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INNOCENT  
BIRDS

*The Stories of T. F. Powys*

THE LEFT LEG  
BLACK BRYONY  
MARK ONLY  
MR. TASKER'S GODS  
MOCKERY GAP

T. F. POWYS

INNOCENT  
BIRDS

LONDON

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# INNOCENT BIRDS

## *Chapter i*

### MRS. CROCKER SEES A VISION

A VILLAGE is like a stage that retains the same scenery throughout all the acts of the play. The actors come and go, and walk to and fro, with gestures that their passions fair or foul use them to.

Sometimes the human beings who occupy the stage, that is, the farms and village cottages, remain the same—or almost the same—for many years ; sometimes they change more quickly.

A country village has a way now and again of clearing out all its inhabitants in one rush, as though it were grown tired of that particular combination of human destinies, and shakes itself free of them as a tree might do of unwelcome leaves.

This shake comes perhaps like the last trump, with a loud noise ; as when Farmer Mew set afire his gunpowder, and so caused the people to go off in all directions : some far and some near, but all bent on going.

When the Gillets left and Farmer Mew died, others began to leave Madder too. Mr. and Mrs. Summerbee moved to a larger garden in

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Wiltshire, that was walled in, and possessed a greenhouse where fine grapes were ripened, and where the strawberry beds were less weedy and more sheltered from prying eyes. The Squibbs went too, to work for Squire Pye, some miles away in a larger village, where the young ladies—for even Nellie had grown plump and respectable out at service—regarded themselves as good as the best, and insisted upon being called ‘Miss’ by the boys. And Nellie’s manners told these same boys plainly enough that she’d grown into something to be looked at and not to be touched.

When a village shakes itself free of the old order, it lets those who belong to it fall hard sometimes and break their heads. Thus, in giving place to the new, Mad Tom Button was a sufferer, being found drowned in the Dodderdown river, that he descended into because he wanted to be a tadpole.

But the person that was missed most of all by the Madder meadows was Minnie Cuddy, who married a stout gentleman that farmed in Norfolk and kept large oxen nearly as fat as himself. And so to Norfolk Minnie went with her husband.

When she was gone, Mr. Soper, who had loved her deeply, found living a hard matter, and more especially at breakfast time. For it was then that Mrs. Soper always spoke of Minnie, and called her names : harlot being the mildest of them. Soper, feeling that there was only one

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way for him to go in order to escape from the breakfast table, decided that death by natural causes was better than bacon and bad names, and so died happy—thinking of Minnie.

The new element, that now came into Madder to live, altered the village taste so much that the older residents, who still remained, drooped and hung down their heads. Even though Mr. Billy's nieces, Eva and May, had come to help to sell the sugar, Mr. Billy grew more and more mournful, and Andrew Corbin was often heard to say that 'life wasn't what it used to be.' To be sure, these gentlemen couldn't help finding it hard to get used to the new faces that brought new ways with them.

'I wish Job Wimple wouldn't look at me so much in church,' Mr. Billy was overheard to say one day to his wife.

'New Sexton do like to look at an old man that don't stop 'is cough,' replied Mrs. Billy, who was the sort of woman that Death in His travels passes by.

Love Cottage, where Minnie Cuddy used to live and keep her white hens, was now occupied by Mr. Solly, who changed the name to 'Gift Cottage,' not unsuitably, because a gift should always follow love.

But the name 'Gift Cottage' came in a more strange way than from the mere sequence of events that follow a proper cause; for Solly's aunt, Deborah Crocker, told him a strange tale

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about Madder hill, that he, being a good nephew to his aunt, entirely believed.

‘Aunt,’ Solly had inquired, ‘what have you seen at Madder?’

‘I have seen God,’ replied Mrs. Crocker.

And she went on to tell her nephew how she had been to Madder to look at Love Cottage, hoping to buy it as a surprise for him, and wishing, too, to live there for a while herself; though later she found that she could not do so, owing to the ever increasing weakness that came with the illness from which she died. The day chosen by Deborah Crocker for her visit to Madder proved a sunny one, though upon Madder hill there rested a yellow cloud.

Now Aunt Crocker liked clouds; because upon sunny days they made pleasant shadows, and upon windy ones they ran with a merry glee across the sky from one end to the other, like happy children. But as the cloud upon Madder hill neither ran in the sky nor yet shaded the meadows, but merely rested, as though Madder hill were its footstool, Aunt Crocker had a mind to go and see what it was. Leaving her hired trap in the village, she slowly climbed the hill, saying to herself in her most matter-of-fact way ‘that she hoped the cloud didn’t mean rain.’

A certain phrase, ‘pure in heart,’ though thought meaningless by some—and certainly Deborah never used it herself—became Solly’s aunt more than any other that we know of.



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When Aunt Crocker arrived at the top of the hill a little heated with her climb, she knew the cloud to be no rain-cloud, and therefore there was no likelihood of her catching a cold from it. 'Anything is better than rain,' Mrs. Crocker said, watching a thorn-bush that the golden cloud appeared to have set a match to.

Aunt Crocker knew her company, and when a Presence stood clothed in burning gold upon the hill, she knew that she saw a vision.

She sighed, not from nervousness, but merely because she was glad it didn't rain. Her sigh was a contented one, and she waited to see what the vision would do.

The Presence looked lovingly at Madder, and spread itself out over the valley as though it had grown fond of the very mice and moles in the meadows.

Only after the cloud had risen heavenwards, as an eagle rises when it courts the sun, did Mrs. Crocker know what it had said to her.

But her first thought, when the vision went, was about the thorn-bush, that she expected to see burnt to a cinder. But the flames had been too golden to burn, so the bush was saved. Whether the words the vision had spoken came from the burning bush or no, Aunt Crocker was not sure. But anyhow, she had got them clear enough—that the Presence had promised a gift to Madder with its love, and that the gift would be given as a solace to some one. Aunt

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Crocker thought this a little vague, but she supposed that she hadn't listened as carefully as she should have done, and had thought more about the fate of a sparrow that had unluckily been perched upon the bush when it flared up.

Deborah was a gentle lady of simple manners, who wore little hats ; but she had wide opinions. She had never seen a vision before. And as the cloud had called her to it, and had not disappointed her when she climbed the hill by merely containing nasty raindrops, she supposed that it meant her to follow its ways, and to discover what kind of present it had to give, and to whom it would be given. Not being able, owing to illness, to do so herself, she handed on the quest to Mr. Solly, to whom she told the story.

Mr. Solly was pleased with Gift Cottage. He liked the garden. He liked flowers nearly as much as Susan Summerbee had liked hens. His favourite flowers were white pinks and columbines, and his favourite vegetable runner beans. Mr. Solly dug his garden with a spade that cut deep and easily, and he left only one little corner unplanted. He left this corner because he could never make up his mind what to sow there. He thought of a pumpkin—but no, that would not suit. Horse radish ?—they would spread everywhere. An apple tree ?—it might die. Nothing would do, and so Solly let the corner remain barren, though he hoped that one day he would think of something proper to plant there. When

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at Weyminster, Solly, whose age might have been anything between thirty and fifty, was never known by any other name than Mrs. Crocker's nephew. If anything exciting happened in Grove Road, Weyminster, where Deborah Crocker used to live, the neighbours would say : ' Call for Mrs. Crocker's nephew, he understands gardening.' And so Solly would be invited to catch and hold a burglar, who had climbed into the pantry window at Number 7, until the police came. Miss Pettifer, who always enjoyed her early morning walks to the St. Luke's communion service because she could quietly hate her neighbours in the road—and Mrs. Crocker the most—if she heard, as she sometimes did, the sound of a hoe in Deborah's back garden, would sniff the morning air as though she smelt brimstone, and thank the good God for creating a pretty place called Hell, and a pretty person called the Devil, for wicked nephews to go to who worked on Sundays.

No one could have had a higher opinion of a nephew than Aunt Crocker had of hers. ' If this country understood his value as I do,' she would say, ' he would be made Prime Minister.'

' He has a title above that,' Mr. Tucker replied, who was Deborah's friend as well as Miss Pettifer's,—' he is your nephew.'

But, alas, we must own here that the world had no very high opinion of Mr. Solly ; for with his nervous look and sorrowful moustache to

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match, he made no great figure in the market-place when he bought spring cabbage plants. And Solly, seeing himself in this market manner, and not as his aunt did, thought his presence in the world by no means important.

Once settled at Madder, his greatest pleasure was to remember and to tell himself again what his aunt had said. He would remember little pieces of her conversation, put them together when he wanted to, say them over to himself, and then put them back into his mind again.

‘And above all,’ Aunt Crocker had said, ‘live quietly at Madder, Nephew Solly, and watch, for I am anxious to know what God’s gift to Madder will be, and to whom it will be given.’

It is always pleasant to think of anything that is to be given away as a free gift from a kind giver. Mr. Solly was well fitted for the supreme task of watching. Though he knew it was not exactly his business, except that Aunt Crocker had asked him to do it, he felt he could not do any harm in the matter. Besides, with his columbines cooing at Gift Cottage, and his runner beans growing as high as a great hedge, there was no reason why he should not walk out sometimes in the Madder lanes to see what would happen next, as we all like to do.



## *Chapter ii*

### ‘THE SILENT WOMAN’

MR. SOLLY entered Madder in a quiet fashion. He walked behind the waggon that carried his furniture, like a poor man, exchanging a word or two about the weather with those he met. He trod softly in the village lanes as though he were stepping upon holy ground.

He liked the place as soon as ever he got the first view of it, where the road crosses the hills. There was a puritan freshness about Madder that took away Solly's timidity and bade him welcome. In Madder he had his occupation—one of the choicest—a gardener's. Besides that, he had his aunt's orders ‘to watch.’

He never went out of his door of a morning, dull or shining, without looking up in an expectant way at Madder hill, upon the top of which he hoped one day to see the golden cloud settle again like a great yellow butterfly. Sometimes when the large rich ivy leaves that grew about his door were wet, he would do more than look at the hill. He would climb it. For if mist hid the top, might there not be the golden cloud hid within it? And so Solly would go up and stand beside the thorn-bush and watch the little birds, that would twitter and peep

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at him in a naughty mocking manner. And curiously enough—though whether it was the cool air upon the hill that caused the feeling we cannot say—when Solly came home again after making this journey, he returned with a kind of peace in his heart that it was pleasant to have. And when he picked a flower and smelt it after going to the hill, the scent of the flower would contain more than its usual fragrance.

We can think of no place in the world that is more pleasant to watch in than Madder. It is a place of pasture-land and sheep-folds, green meadows, and trees that in the summer are like the open fans of pretty ladies, and in the winter like harps for the winds to dance to.

Madder hill has the same roundness as the trees, though more mass. The further downs have line, a virtue that painters of old were wont to praise and moderns still envy.

These downs were high enough to keep out the vulgar, and near enough so that any one coming down the white road could be seen easily. There is no harshness in Madder; there are the strong lines and the more gentle: the high male outline above, and the yielding and softer female below, that follows the little brook and is joined in wedlock to Shelton.

Solly was companionable. Madder had greeted him in a friendly manner, though a little inquisitively, and he returned the favour so far as to stand or lean, when he was out watching, beside

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a meadow gate, a pretty place for conversation ; upon the posts of which were carved the names of three gentlemen : John Pim, George Chick, Job Wimple. Upon the gate was writ in broad letters, as though in mockery, ‘ Mr. Barfoot wi’ ’is Betty.’ Beside this last word was drawn a foot like an elephant’s. The explanation of this picture being, that Farmer Barfoot possessed a club foot, that always interested him so greatly that he would talk to it, ask it questions, and call it ‘ Betty.’

The meadow gate, an important one in our tale, stood about a hundred yards from ‘ The Silent Woman,’ the closed inn of Madder. The inn owned an unfortunate history, the result of which was that no gentleman that had a wife who could fry onions tastily in fat, would care to consider even for a moment the possibility of taking over ‘ The Silent Woman.’ The truth of the matter being, that within a short while, as time is reckoned in Madder, three wives of three landlords had died in the house.

There was nothing in the outward appearance of Madder inn to warrant this tendency in the matter of wife-killing. It had not the bare uninviting look of Madder Rectory ; and although the windows were boarded up, in case any little boy might want to discover what happened to glass when a pebble hit it, the inn looked as though an elbow could be lifted as gratefully there as in any other country tavern. When the

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weather was rather misty, when the sun was dimmed, or the little clouds running fast, the Madder inn, though closed, showed more signs than upon sunny days, of malicious doings ; and having no landlady to deal with, got to tormenting strangers.

It once whispered by means of a little bird to a poor gentleman of Norbury, in whose cottage home the cat had carried off the stuffed supper rabbit—leaving Mrs. Potten's tongue behind, which the good man, a carpenter and undertaker, could have spared far better than his supper—that at Madder there still existed a generous release from worldly cares—an inn.

Mr. Potten, remarking that he was merely going to see how ' Wold Corbin was,' in the hope of gaining a little trade later on, walked to Madder, with the step of a man who meant to get there, having a half-crown in his pocket, but no certain knowledge of the closed condition of ' The Silent Woman.' Mr. Potten's memory had set a trap for Mr. Potten, by showing a pretty picture of himself in the bar of this same ' Silent Woman ' where a certain Mrs. Told, a former landlady, had allowed him—during the heat of a conversation about apple grafting—to stroke and fondle her hand, although she knew him to be a good undertaker and a married man. Mr. Potten had himself buried that lady, but he always hoped that another pretty one would take her place whose hand he might stroke. And in this hope he



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walked—beckoned on by the spirit of the silent woman—holding the half-crown in his hand, and his hand in his trouser pocket, which gave a sort of double chance to the money to get to the Madder inn.

On the road Mr. Potten saw a vision of happiness : the happiness that lives inside a curtained bar window, where even the flies have a drunken way of walking, and can be watched and smiled at—as friends. But not Mr. Potten alone—who might have had a compact with ‘The Silent Woman’ to help him at his trade—but others, and more thirsty ones even than him, had wandered over those hills to be disappointed. And no very happy matter was it to arrive at Madder with money to spend, and to find the door locked and the wet wind the only quencher of one’s thirst.

But all this beguiling of the wayfarer was but mere play to ‘The Silent Woman,’ whose real importance lay in its habit of putting to silence for ever the wives of the landlords, and laying eastward their women’s feet, that had trod so many steps—even the very youngest of them—fetching and carrying for the men.

*Chapter iii*  
JOHN PIM

MR. PIM had not lived long in Maddar before it became clear to those who saw him that he shone most of all by means of his cheeks, which were of a high colour even in winter, for in those dull days the wind took the part of the summer sun to keep their colour upon them.

When Pim spoke it would be in a low tone, and only when he sang his song, 'In from Spain,' a song that Mr. Pim believed he himself belonged to, did the real man appear.

It was then that his whiskers lived.

But Mr. Pim's difference from other people—and his fame arose from this difference—lay in the fact that he had his doubts about some quite ordinary happenings in nature, happenings that most simple-minded people take for granted.

He was catholic enough and modest enough, however, to approach any one whom he thought ought to know more than he knew for advice respecting these doubts, hoping one day to dissipate them. And so with his song, that one day might become true, and his doubt transformed into belief, we may hope as well as Pim that some day strange events may come.

Perhaps it was not all chance that Mr. Pim

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should have been born in a small hamlet, about two miles from God's Maddar, where there were willow trees, and a little brook to be crossed by the children on their way to school. No doubt destiny arranged that. Destiny also arranged that John should walk to school with Minna Bond, who wore socks, and where they didn't reach to there was white skin, a little silky. During these walks Minna would confide all her secrets to little John.

Coming home from school, as was natural, she was more talkative than in going, because she often had some new experience or other, met with in her play there, to tell of.

'I've been playing wi' Jackie and Bert, under they trees, at being married,' Minna remarked one afternoon, as they went together down the lane, under the great elm tree, where the missel-thrush built its nest. 'An' now I've 'ee to walk wi', an' at home there be grandfer waiting for a game.' Minna laughed noisily, as though she saw no end to her enjoyments. She also looked scornfully and in a superior manner at three cows that were feeding in a meadow, and threw a stone at them just to show that she was a girl, while they were mere cows.

The next day Minna ran out from her cottage with a new idea in her head, her frock unfastened and her socks showing the wrong side.

The doctor had come in the night, and she had been awakened from a nice dream about being

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married by frightful screams, and still more awful groans, that came very distinctly through the thin wooden partition into little Minna's room. Minna had heard of the Day of Judgment: she supposed it was come, and stopped her ears and hid her head under the bedclothes. When she peeped out again she heard the doctor washing his hands, and the nurse, Mrs. Tory, say very despairingly, 'Thee's bed be worse ruined than when t'other did come, for there bain't a dry patch on en.'

And as though to confirm Mrs. Tory's words about the bed, a tiny voice began to cry that Minna thought was a little pig's.

In the field where the cows were, Minna taunted John Pim.

'You can't make a baby like my mammy,' she said.

John wisely replied, as so many have done before him, 'that he didn't know what he could do until he tried.'

Minna laughed and ran on, lifting her heels higher than was necessary.

When school was over she walked home in a very thoughtful manner, and kept away from John.

'No, don't 'ee touch I,' she said in a grand knowing way, when John tried to pull her off the stepping-stones into the brook. 'Don't 'ee touch I, for 'tis most like 'ee'd do it.'

'Do what?' asked John, with one foot on a stone and the other held high above the water.

## JOHN PIM

' 'Tis two that kiss same as black slugs in wet grass that do bring a baby ; 'tain't Mrs. Tory.'

She ran away laughing, partly because of what she had said, and partly because John's foot had slipped and he had fallen backwards into the water.

John wanted to know more. But he did not ask Minna to explain the matter better, because 'they maidens be so fun making'; and so instead he asked the school teacher. After receiving a pretty sharp caning for his inquiry, John decided in his child's mind that it must be a very hard matter, and a very troublesome one, to make a baby. As he grew older, he very much doubted whether such a difficult task could ever be managed by him, even if Minna, and later Annie, would modestly help.

When John Pim was grown to man's estate, and began to court Annie Brine, who was in service with Miss Pettifer at Weyminster, he very naturally looked forward to his wedding day with a more than common anxiety.

John hoped that his mind would be then relieved of the doubt that troubled it.

And even if his doubt wasn't removed then, Annie had told him that Miss Pettifer was well able, both by breeding and education, to answer any question, however hard, that was put to her ; and so Pim trusted that his Annie's mistress wouldn't allow such a state of sad ignorance to always clog the life of the husband of her late faithful handmaiden. The wedding day came,



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as such days will, sooner than expected, and poor Pim was rendered more than usually nervous by the extreme wonder and whiteness of Annie's wedding frock. He tried not to listen to his new boots, creaking as he walked up the church aisle with her, and he looked down at his black trousers—likewise new—hoping that they would comfort him, and explain why Annie looked so different. In the pocket of those very wedding trousers—and no doubt it is there still—there was, for Annie had asked him to keep it safe, a letter that Miss Pettifer had written a day or two before to Annie Brine.

*'Dear Brine,' wrote Miss Pettifer, 'I wish you every happiness as Mrs. Pim. But kindly remember that married happiness always brings responsibilities. You will know what I mean by this when your first child comes'—and so poor Annie did. 'My present to you will be a fender and fire-irons. And I should be glad if you would kindly ask Mr. Balliboy to call here for them as soon as possible. As you know, for you have been sent down to clean them, they have been kept in my cellar for some years, and if you didn't get all the rust off them you will have plenty of time to finish cleaning them at Madder. My new maid, Parsons, is very unsatisfactory; she says she isn't used to margarine, but that's only one of her lies.*

*'One last word of advice to you, Brine: keep*

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*all the money your husband earns, and never allow him to go, no, not for one moment, to the inn.—I remain, yours truly, Agnes Pettifer.'*

Two months after his wedding, Mr. Pim, having gone to market with three of Farmer Barfoot's fat hogs, met Miss Pettifer in the Westminster High Street, and touching his hat with extreme reverence, thanked her for her letter.

Miss Pettifer, who had just threatened to put her new servant, Miss Parsons, and her tin box into the road, looked kindly at Pim, and asked if there was anything she could do to help his wife.

Pim, seeing so much friendliness in Miss Pettifer, and thinking her a very learned lady as well as a kind one, asked her a simple question that had troubled him during many a married night. 'Be thik the notion?' Mr. Pim had ended the conversation very simply by saying.

Instead of answering Pim, as any decent lady who was well over forty would have done, by either saying that she didn't know, or else that as far as her own learning went he had done as well as a man could, and should leave the rest to nature, Miss Pettifer threw her glove at him, and went to a policeman, who smilingly informed Pim 'that questions of they sorts were best left for inn parlours.'

Mr. Pim ruefully entered the Unicorn.

*Chapter iv*  
SOLLY'S BOOK

SUMMER days are more pleasantly spent in Madder than elsewhere, because whichever way you may turn, provided you don't turn to the rectory, there are lambs skipping, larks singing, cows modestly feeding, now in the shadow and now in the sun, and horses that regard the meadows as their own.

Rabelais of Chinon in France had a simple modest word of praise to give to the little town where he lived—and if we do but borrow we harm no one. For if we look up in Madder, too, there is the hill, and if we look down there are the meadows. Though one isn't a happy cow, one can chew the green grass and buttercups as well as they, by merely looking, and so become nearly as modest and ruminatingly happy as a beast. If the days go by and we do nothing more than watch, as Mr. Solly did when he had planted his garden, we should be no less happy than the daisies that only grow, whiten the green for a little, and then sink into the earth again, as we must all do. Mr. Solly looked at the simple green things of Madder, that most people take so little thought of, because he was there for that very purpose—to see what would happen. And

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as he knew that the moon daisies must know all about 'that cloud' as well as Aunt Crocker, he watched and walked in the fields as well as regarding the men and women that he met. Solly had not been at Madder very long before the green fields as well as the lane that led him there took the form in his imagination, confirmed by Mrs. Crocker's vision, of holy ground. A long time had been spent by some one in making them exactly what they were, and in making them so suitable for a good gift. God's gift Solly knew would be a pretty one, a present worth the waiting for through a few dark winter days and summer sultry ones. Solly would see the new spring colour that made of Madder a patchwork quilt; and also note the time of the fall, when the dyed garment of Madder took a more natural and earthly colour that, besides a nice coolness of texture, remains the longest.

Mr. Solly's white pinks were so fine when July came in, that every one said that, though the late occupier of the cottage—Minnie Cuddy—had some very beautiful white hens, yet Mr. Solly's white pinks were even more lovely. The scent of these white pinks now came into Solly's open window, as well as a white butterfly, that flew in for no better reason than to settle for a moment upon the book that Mr. Solly had before him. Perhaps the butterfly had a mind to know from Mr. Solly what the book was about, for it

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remained settled there until Solly took it up and put it gently out of the window.

Mr. Solly opened the book, now that the butterfly was gone to the pinks again. The book was *A History of America*, by R. Mackenzie, and Aunt Crocker had given it to him. Though Mr. Solly had never been to America, he liked to read its history. He thought of this history in his own manner of thinking as inspired, believing every word of the particular account that the book gave him. 'America stopped,' thought Mr. Solly, 'where the history ended.' Solly could never have brought himself to see America, as so many do, as a wide chess-board sort of prairie, with Noah's ark trees, and cities like so many high hats, put about in the fields. Mr. Mackenzie certainly told him of a very different place to that. Although Solly believed that America was still inhabited by people, yet had he gone there he would have certainly expected to see the old order still in being.

'There are texts there that will please you,' Aunt Crocker had said. Solly thought so too, and he liked the Americans for what they had been, and for what they had done. He saw them in the past as written large—as interesting people should be—by Mr. Mackenzie; not in the mocking learned way that modern historians tap old barrels of former days, drawing them dry, but with the modest reserve of a wise man who lets a character step into a page and go his ways.

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Solly opened his book. The Madder honey that he had eaten for his dinner had tasted as lovely as the white pinks smelt. He thought of Deborah Crocker with befitting gratitude, and wished to see what some one in America had been doing. He opened upon a good man. His name was Roger Williams. He was a clergyman—'godly and zealous.'

Solly was glad to have met him. He felt sure that Mr. Williams would have liked his aunt, and when he knelt down on the grass to smell the white pinks before going out, he told them softly that 'Roger was a clergyman.'

Mr. Solly suited Madder well enough. He fell into its ways as soon as he came there. He liked Mr. Tucker, the Dodderdown clergyman who preached in Madder on Sunday afternoons, and who used to be, when she lived, a friend of Mrs. Crocker's. He also liked Farmer Barfoot's little brown and spotted pigs that ran grunting, in a high state of excitement, in the lanes.

At Madder, Solly was more often called 'Mrs. Crocker's nephew' than Mr. Solly; because the man who brought the furniture to Gift Cottage had given that name to him, telling Mr. Billy, whom he stopped to speak to, 'There do go Mrs. Crocker's nephew behind load, same as me lame dog do run.'

And so when Mr. Solly mentioned his aunt, he did no more than what the people expected. But when Pim and Chick heard him come out



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with a text from his book, they put him down as being a better-informed person in the way of the world than a mere 'Aunt Crocker's nephew' was likely to be.

No one in Madder is ever liked for what they are, but always for something that belongs to them ; some oddity like the farmer's lame foot, that is nearer than a possession, and is easier to understand than the man himself, who is ever a mystery, not to Madder folk alone, but to wise Solomon in Jerusalem too. Mr. Solly had two strings to his bow : his aunt's words, that he so well remembered, and his texts. He either went with his aunt or with the Americans. And whichever of the two he spoke from, his words were always listened to with attention by Madder gossips, and a remark would follow at the end of them, such as, 'They Americans bain't all b—— fools,' or else, 'Thik Solly's wold aunt, she were a woman.' So carefully did Madder avoid committing itself.

## *Chapter v*

### ‘SUNSHINE DO BURN’

MR. SOLLY, happy because he felt what a good man Roger must have been, opened gently—so that it shouldn’t bang—the white gate of Gift Cottage and went out. He walked through the Madder lanes, now and again looking up at the hedges and green trees as if he thanked them for shading him. He took the lane that led to the meadow gate where, later on in the day, there would generally be standing two or three of the gentlemen whose names cut in the wood of the gate showed that they belonged there.

On his way Mr. Solly passed a new villa, a partly built one, that stood near to the Madder brook that was crossed by stepping-stones.

This house was named ‘Boston Villa,’ because the son of the late owner, Mr. Mellor, lived in Boston city, and Mr. Mellor, a retired grocer, could think of no better name for the new house than the city’s name that his son John had gone to.

He had the name written above the door in large letters before the windows were put in. But the excitement of seeing it—for he loved his son—or else the weight of his seventy years, was too much for his heart, and Mr. Mellor fell down in a fit before Mr. Potten, the builder, could catch him,

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and died of his injuries. The building of 'Boston Villa' stopped when Mr. Mellor fell, but the house gave that spot a name, and also a shelter for any young people who wanted to be alone together, and out of the rain.

After looking at 'Boston Villa' a little sadly, for he didn't like to think that poor Mr. Mellor should have died so suddenly, Mr. Solly continued his walk, and was surprised to find that the meadow gate, to which he meant to go, was inhabited. Two men leaned against the gate, looking as if they had come there for some very important reason, but had, as soon as they reached it, entirely forgotten what the reason was. These men were John Pim and George Chick. They were dressed in black. Mr. Chick had a sallow countenance, with large cheek bones, but sunken cheeks. He was wont to regard the ground near to his feet with a sad interest, as though it wasn't a kind act of his to walk upon it. Mr. Chick was a humble gentleman, with one want and one fear; who always looked at Job Wimple, the Madder sexton, when he met him, as if he felt that Job would make him one day do what he did not want to. Chick was afraid of a new dug grave, and if Job were ever employed about one, Mr. Chick would avoid the sight, if possible, by giving the churchyard a wide berth when on his way to work. He was, that afternoon however, destined to go there in the garments of a mourner, though a fearing one.

## ‘SUNSHINE DO BURN’

Even though Mr. Chick was so humble, he hoped one day to be an honoured man. He had unluckily missed being regarded by all Madder as an important one, as he had certainly hoped to be when one day he was tossed by Farmer Barfoot's bull ; but as he lit upon some soft dung, and was not hurt, no distinction, save a contemptuous sniff from his little daughter Maud, came of it. Mr. Chick clung in friendship to Mr. Pim, rather than to Job Wimple, whom he regarded with awe and trembling ; and Chick hoped, by the aid of a mysterious quality called intuition, that it would be through John Pim that one day he would get what he wanted.

Chick and Pim now waited, as if their Sunday clothes rather than themselves had come to the gate, and only to rub against it.

‘Sunshine do burn hot,’ said Chick, who appeared to discover then for the first time in his life that the sun could give warmth sometimes.

Pim shook his head. He was wondering at that moment whether a natural act that must have been done by some one could really have been done by him. He looked casually and disinterestedly towards the road that led down into Madder by way of the hills, as if it were just possible that a stray cow might be wandering there ; while the truth was, that the expected really happened to be his wife. Mrs. Pim in her coffin, and her infant son who lived, and who

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was to return to Madder in the care of Mrs. Chick, Annie Pim's sister. Standing beside the gate, Mr. Solly watched the churchyard. He expected to see the Rev. Thomas Tucker, who should have been by then in readiness to meet the funeral, and perhaps Wimple, who always took a master's pride in the graves he dug. Job Wimple was there, and Susy, who dusted the church and set traps for the mice, and who listened with more than a proper interest when Mr. Tucker mentioned God in his sermons. Susy, a large black figure, stood in the church porch and held up a broom, as if she meant to sweep the heavens clean.

But Mr. Tucker was not at present visible.

' 'Tis well that they school children bain't about,' remarked Mr. Chick, who hated silence. 'For if they children were out to play, parson mid be late for funeral.'

'But there bain't nothing come yet,' said Pim, a little disappointedly.

'Poor parson be afeard,' said Chick, who liked to get any sort of matter safely out of his head when he once started it coming, 'of they playing children.'

Pim nodded.

'Farmer Barfoot do say that if so be 'e were to stop one little foot a-kicking, even though 'tis naughtiness they be at, 'e'd drown 'isself.'

Pim nodded.

'Poor parson would go round by way of stars

## ‘SUNSHINE DO BURN’

and moon sooner than stop one small girl from doing what she shouldn't.’

“ ‘Tis thik story book,” Susy do say, that ’e do always carry in ’is pocket, that do tell ’e to let happy folk bide happy,’ said Pim to Solly, by way of explaining the clergyman’s odd behaviour as narrated by Mr. Chick.

Solly now looked at the church again, and saw the short figure of a man, whose gait expressed itself in little runs and quick steps, hurry into the churchyard.

This was Mr. Thomas Tucker, who carried his hat in his hand, and whose head—for he had but one or two streaks of grey hair to be proud of—glistened in the sun.

Mr. Tucker at first hastened to the new grave, tripping over an old one in the journey. But hearing the laughing voices of children playing in the lane near by, he appeared to change his mind when he stood upon his legs again, and retired quickly into the church.

‘Poor man,’ said Chick feelingly, ‘ ’tis a pity ’e don’t know why they children do laugh, for if ’e did ’is poor heart would be comforted.’

‘Parson be come,’ remarked Mr. Pim, ‘before they tothers be come.’

The summer sun does not only stand still in the Book of Joshua. It likes to rest in these days for a little while over Madder. Upon that other occasion it stopped going, out of pure astonishment and fear, at seeing so many flashing spears,



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and thought no doubt that it had set the sand on fire. In Madder the sun sometimes stays still in the sky for a few moments, in order to see how the little girls and the sparrows are behaving.

All things, of course, interest the sun, and here in Madder is a new grave to peep into. After peeping into the grave the sun waited, in a rather wicked mood, for Miss Polly Wimple to come.

Upon the hills, where the hot summer mist stayed very still, something wonderful now arrived in view. And whatever this wonderful thing was, it caught the interest of Mr. Pim in a remarkable way. He watched it, as though he hoped very much that his eyes were not lying to him. The new thing shone brilliantly; it shone like a star, and remained stationary upon the hill for a moment, as though it waited there on purpose to be admired.

Meanwhile, another party had come to the gate. This was Job Wimple who, having satisfied himself that the grave was as ready as he could make it, wished to show a little of the knowledge he was so proud of to those who waited in the lane. His arrival caused Chick, who noticed the charnel chalkiness of Wimple's boots, to hide behind Pim.

Solly nodded to Wimple, and Wimple looked at the hills. For Mr. Wimple to have remarked truthfully what he thought the shining thing he saw really was, would have raised Pim's glory.

## ‘SUNSHINE DO BURN’

And so, forgetting for the moment that a sort of afterglow from those plumes would do honour to his own gravedigging, Mr. Wimple consulted his memory, so that he might be thought wise. He remembered Mr. Tucker’s last Sunday’s sermon.

‘ ’Tis God’s holy ark that be coming over hill,’ he said, ‘that thik Dagon did pinch from poor David.’

‘ Wimple do know a lot,’ Chick murmured to a little daisy beside his boot.

‘ ’Tain’t God’s ark or Noah’s ark ; ’tis a hearse,’ said Pim breathlessly.

Whether or no the sun, besides waiting for little Polly, had employed its idleness in putting a rather odd fancy into Mr. Pim’s head, we cannot say. But Pim undoubtedly saw Death at that moment as a very pretty thing. Death had certainly never shone so bright before in Mr. Pim’s remembrance, and had never come into Madder before carrying a looking-glass in His hand to admire Himself on His path to the grave.

Feeling how wonderful it all was under that shining sun, Pim looked about Madder in order to see if any one else was watching.

He saw Farmer Barfoot leaning over the churchyard wall, while a small group of Madder folk were waiting in the lane near to the church, and Susy, still in the porch, was excitedly waving her broom at the hills. At the bottom of Mr. Pim’s heart there was a deep fount of pride, as well as

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his own unbelief. He saw himself now as the one to be looked at, and talked about, by old Death, the gossip, who had broken up the usual tediousness of a hot afternoon by taking the breath of life from Mistress Annie Pim in the Weyminster hospital.

Annie had been first taken there when she was frightened. She was frightened by something Mr. Bugby, the innkeeper, who lived at the sign of the Unicorn, had said or done. Annie, who was expecting in a month or two, had only gone to Mr. Bugby's to deliver a parcel, out of kindness to carrier Balliboy, he being wont to save himself many a trouble in this world by handing them on to others.

At the Unicorn, Annie was conducted politely into the bar parlour, that happened to be empty at the time, by Mr. Bugby himself, who, after paying the carriage for the parcel, frightened her.

How he did it no one knew, for all she could be got to say about her fright was, 'That she had never seen a man behave like that before.' After the baby came, Annie fainted, and however much the doctors tried to save her, Death proved Himself more clever than they, and she died.

She died a little too soon for even her sister, Mrs. Chick, to hear what it was that had happened. For when Mrs. Chick arrived hot and hurried, and all anxiety to hear, she found that Annie had spoken her last word in this world ; and that wasn't about Mr. Bugby, being merely, 'Tell

sister that John’s shirt front be only rough dried, ‘tain’t ironed for Sunday.’ . . .

The wonderful thing that had shone so excitedly upon the hills now began to move down into the shadow of the lane. It approached the meadow gate slowly, not from respect for the dead, but only because the driver—a silent gentleman in a tall silk hat—was anxious to finish smoking the pipe that he had stopped to light upon the hill before reaching Madder. As the carriage approached, Mr. Pim regarded the driver with a fixed stare, as though he were no ordinary person, but had dropped down into his seat, pipe, hat, and all, from on high. Mr. Pim, as well as Wimple—who had to because of his trade—was a good Churchman, and used to listen upon a Sunday afternoon to Mr. Tucker’s preaching.

Sometimes Mr. Tucker would name in his sermons—we must own a little distrustfully—the third person of the Holy Trinity. And there grew up correspondingly in Mr. Pim’s mind, who liked a mystery, the form of a figure that he considered would resemble the one named by Mr. Tucker. And this figure exactly resembled the driver of the hearse.

The hearse stopped when it reached the gate where the three men were standing, and the driver gently knocked out the ashes of his pipe against the black wood upon which one of the plumes hung. After doing so he inquired of Solly, in a careless tone, the way to the church.

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Mr. Solly stepped into the road—he was always anxious to help any one—and explained to the driver that he had nothing else to do but to drive right on, for the place he wished to go to was straight in front of him.

The driver, celestial as Pim saw him, was a little deaf, and leant down towards Solly with his hand to his ear, so that Solly was forced to speak louder and clearer. Making use of his own eyes, after Solly had spoken, he saw the church tower, and clicked twice in order to make the horse—that had been looking at the grass by the wayside as a child might at a shop window with iced cakes in it—go on. The mourners followed, while Solly kept pace with them, though walking by the lane side. He was interested, as he knew his aunt would have been, in the occupants of the plumed carriage.

*Chapter vi*

THE SUN KISSES POLLY

MR. PIM had never seen the glory of a town funeral before, though he had often wished to ; so the appearance that had come shining over the hill, bearing his wife to him, was as superior to the waggon that he had expected, as the driver—as Pim saw him—was from an ordinary man. Mr. Chick felt gratified too, though more humbly so ; because Mrs. Chick was sitting beside her sister's coffin, shaded from the vulgar by that wonderful carriage, and holding Pim's infant son in her arms. By the church gates the hearse stopped, as though it had merely come all the way from Weyminster to be admired ; and nothing happened for some minutes except this admiration from all the eyes present. While the bearers were getting ready for their burden and waiting for the clergyman to come, the horse, with a total want of respect to the occasion, began to crop the grass, pulling the hearse a little nearer to the hedge in order to get the best bites. And now the sun began to move again : for it is only in the heat of the Madder day that it loiters, and this day, alas, with no very good intentions. For, beguiled with the wanton thoughts that so often come to such idlers, it had made up its mind to



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kiss, and that in no very proper manner, baby Polly Wimple. With the sun's movement, the rush and tumble of the stars, and other little heavenly white mice, began again. And in order, no doubt, to illustrate this falling condition of all matter, Polly Wimple, aged two, fell off the bed, while her mother, the same Minna who had shown her legs so prettily to little John, was dressing for the funeral.

'They children bain't got no brains,' remarked Mrs. Wimple, when she picked Polly up. 'An' as 'ee be screaming, 'tain't no time to dress 'ee proper, an' 'tis summer weather.'

Polly was heavy, and in order to enjoy herself at her leisure without her daughter pulling her ears, Mrs. Wimple carried her into the churchyard, set her down upon a grassy grave, and told her to stop crying and play 'wi' they green grasses,' while she herself went to look at the fun.

The fun went slowly, which was the better for every one, because it lasted the longer. Here was pleasure for all. Here was some one that Minna Wimple had talked to only a week ago about the way to make a pancake, and the exact time a sitting hen could leave its nest without the eggs being gone cold : here was this friendly gossip, a woman, who had blouses that buttoned in front because of something she expected to come, and who had even stooped down to pull up her stocking while she talked, now going to

## THE SUN KISSES POLLY

be put into a nice hole in the ground. And wasn't it a triumph to be able to get put in there so sweetly and cleanly, thereby giving joy to others, while the little birds fly in the sky?

Great events came apace upon Mr. Pim. He stood back a little, but his eyes opened wider than ever when Mrs. Chick was helped down. Mrs. Chick held close to her, pressed against her ripe bosoms, that were as large as pumpkins, something that was wrapped in a white woollen shawl. And all he had done about it was so little. But could Annie really be in there, hid by so much costly varnish, and with brass handles even, screwed on so properly? Mr. Pim looked at the Madder fields as though he despised them, and for a reason.

The high hat of the driver had carried his earlier thoughts to the church and to the persons and places named by Mr. Tucker. There was one place Mr. Tucker called 'heaven.'

Mr. Pim looked at the coffin that the town undertaker had provided for his wife, and saw it as 'heaven.'

He remembered how Annie looked when she cut the wedding-cake, on the day that was the supreme mystery of Mr. Pim's life. On that occasion, as he sat looking on with his mouth a little open—as though agape for any kind of information about marriage customs—Pim had tried to recall all that Minna had said when they were children together. 'Minna knew all about it,'

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Pim thought enviously, 'and all because her grandfather was so knowing a man.' Annie, even out of her heaven, had never been so communicative as Minna, who, besides listening so carefully to the amusing explanations of her grandfather, had gone out, wetting her little shoes in the garden grass before a thunder-storm, to watch the slugs.

If only he could get back to those days again, and get Minna to explain things a little better.

Pim had sighed. He knew no further information could be got from her, for she was become Mrs. Wimple—a woman of grown manners, who boiled black-currant puddings—and not that person with the legs, and a mind a good deal more inquisitive about life than a robin's.

And now here was Annie in her heaven, and Pim could only wonder the more about it all.

Everything outside the church gates—and even the horse had its share—had been admired, but still Mr. Tucker delayed his coming to meet the coffin. He had appeared in his surplice once or twice at the church door, where Susy was still standing in an absent-minded manner, with her broom in her hand ; but, on looking out and seeing Polly Wimple seated where her mother had put her, he had hurried into the vestry again.

Polly, having seen Mr. Tucker's round face appear and disappear, not unwisely came to the conclusion that the face was playing peep-bo with her, and so she snatched up her petticoats, with

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hands like red plums, and hid her eyes. And the sun got what it wanted.

Polly's toes, her fat legs, and all her naughty roundness, was shown in the sight of the sun, and all because of the hurry her mother had been in. Polly curled up her toes and knees, and the sun kissed her. She peeped out, hid her face, and the sun kissed her again.

The sun might have gone on kissing Polly all the afternoon, had not Sexton Wimple remembered where his daughter was ; and considering it highly probable—for he knew her ways at home—that she might crawl into the new grave, he looked to see where she was, and beheld her in the very act of holding up her clothes most shamelessly.

‘ ’Tis best ’ee take up thik maid,’ called the sexton to Mrs. Wimple. ‘ For poor parson will never come out of they doors while she be a-playing.’

In front of Miss Polly there was a tombstone, with a cherub's face cut in it. And the face in the church porch not appearing again, Polly fancied it had got into the stone, and so she played peep-bo with it until her mother caught her up, remarking, ‘ Blessed if they maids bain't worser at two than at twenty.’ And as she gave Polly a smack to cure her naughtiness, she said : ‘ How do ’ee think poor Annie can get put under dirt, wi’ ’ee a-showing all theeself to they nasty tombstones ! ’

*Chapter vii*  
MOTHER MAUD

AFTER a funeral is over, most people return to their homes fully conscious that they have not, as the brother or sister has done, passed out of the door never to return. And even Pim, though he had seen such grandeur, and felt how high he was, was grateful to the Power that rules above Madder that he had been left to stand with his boots on, and to receive a welcome at the Chick household doorway by Miss Maud.

Whatever high hat it was that ruled above, Maud ruled the Chicks. She was aged seven; but as each of those seven years had told Maud what life was about, she had come to be, even at this age, far wiser than her mother.

As Maud had not gone to the funeral, she had plenty of time left upon her hands to prepare for her baby. It would be hers of course, for, as all Madder knew, every baby that came was as good as Maud's.

One day Maud intended to be a mother herself, and she wisely thought that the best preparation for that was to see as much of other people's babies as she could.

If Maud had been at Minna Wimple's that same morning, the sun would never have

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had such a chance to kiss Polly in a naughty way.

'When bad Poll do cry, 'tis Maud Chick she do want, 'tain't I,' Mrs. Wimple would say. And she would add in an astonished tone, as though Maud was a kind of lady whose tastes were hard to understand, 'If she do nurse one of they, though they be sicking or screaming, she be happy.' And so Maud was become one of the wonders of Madder because she liked a baby, and wanted to be a mother. When she reached her own cottage, Mrs. Chick handed the living bundle she carried to Maud, sighed as a good Catholic who hands a month of sinning to a kindly priest to take care of, and sat herself heavily in a chair.

Mrs. Chick was a lady of easy manners and a soft womanly presence. Every part of Mrs. Chick had mild likes and milder dislikes. Her hands, in a non-resistant manner, disliked work. Her hair, always untidy, had a modest objection to pins. Her breasts, and Nature had given her womanly ones, had, even when she was fourteen, made her wonder, and blush too.

Walking home with Mrs. Chick under the elms, that didn't seem in the least to him like real Madder trees, Mr. Pim felt interested in life; because he had stepped into a new world that day and had seen a new heaven too. His fancies rose before him so large and wonderful, that he hardly heard her when Maud told him



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to go in by the back door with her daddy ; because of the steps that she had whitened during the moments when the sun was kissing Polly, and the bearers were wondering whether poor Annie would be heavier than Mr. Soper, the last burial.

‘ This bain’t your door,’ Maud cried out to Mr. Pim. ‘ ’Tis back ways that be for fathers.’ Though Maud’s plain talk should have brought Pim to earth again, it didn’t do so. For even then he couldn’t see Madder as in the past : as merely a place you stood upon with hobs in your boots, to hoe or to haymake as the season commanded. For it was now become to him a place of passages and stairways and openings, even in its thickest mass, and all leading to heaven.

It never occurred to Mr. Pim to think that such an abode of bliss could stay in the mould to be tarnished. Those brass handles were much too valuable for that. And so, when Mr. Pim went into the cottage room of the Chicks, and sat down beside Mr. Chick in order to see what would happen next, he was quite unprepared for an old doubt, that had troubled him more than once in his life, to torment his mind again.

Maud had placed Mr. Pim’s son upon Mrs. Chick’s knees, where it was to remain while the new mother prepared some hot water in a basin. Mr. Pim thought his son wonderful, indeed a miracle. But he didn’t wish him to stay miraculous, he wished to account for him, and

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that was why his mind went back now, as at the funeral, to those childish days with Minna, and to other days too, and his troublesome doubt. Minna had certainly, in a most praiseworthy manner, tried to explain, while Annie, wedded and bedded, had but squeezed and liked him. But all that had helped so little to make Pim believe.

When the baby was washed, Mrs. Chick looked at it crossly, which was rather ungrateful of her considering how well it had behaved all the time that Maud had been washing and powdering. But Mrs. Chick had her own reason for disliking Baby Pim at that moment : for had it not been all because of him that she had been forced to ride inside, instead of outside, the fine carriage ? Miss Pettifer, who with two other town ladies had seen the start, had pushed her in there—‘because of the baby’—in almost the same forceful manner as the undertaker’s men had pushed in poor Annie. The drive was a long one, and Mrs. Chick was no friend to the confined silence, to which she was then so near a neighbour. Not that she found fault with Death’s doings, for her drive, whether inside or out, was to his credit ; but she objected merely because he had dropped a curtain over Annie, and so prevented a friendly gossip all about how she had been frightened.

A few faded flowers, too, that lay upon the floor of the hearse began to preach a sermon to Mrs.

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Chick about the end of all pretty things ; that only made the fact that she wasn't next to the driver—who might have looked at her in the way she liked, when he wasn't whipping the horse—the harder to bear. The driver being out of it, there remained only the baby and her poor sister Annie to be talked to, and therefore the conversation could not help being a little one-sided. How much a dead one could hear, even with that dropped curtain, Mrs. Chick did not know ; so she thought it best to begin with a little flattery, as any wise lady would do whose sister, last heard of in Canada, might at any moment have crept sneakingly home, and be behind the door.

' 'Tis a fine thing,' Mrs. Chick had remarked during the drive, 'for they horses and cows to see we go by, and there be a wold man that do wave 'is hat in lane ; I do believe 'tis Mr. Matterface. Maybe 'e do think 'tis a pity 'e bain't died of fright to be so carried. Poor Annie'—Mrs. Chick had lowered her tone into a whisper—'poor Annie, to be so frightened.'

' 'Tis said in town'—the rattle of the carriage made Mrs. Chick talkative—'that Landlord Bugby—and even though no one don't hear, 'tis best to say it—though 'is face be so white and simple, do act funny sometimes. 'E do talk of it wi' 'is own wife, who be sorrowful. " 'Tis how I be," Mr. Bugby do say, "that do fright they maids." "'E can't help what 'e do do," Mrs. Bugby do tell folk. "He do go out and

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do fright they, not meaning to be wicked ; but 'e will end by killing I, and 'e do wish I dead," Mrs. Bugby do say.'

As they went along, Mrs. Chick had noticed a large bare tree in a field, that had been struck by lightning the summer before, and while the tree was still in view the baby began to cry.

' I bain't Maud,' said Mrs. Chick crossly, ' an' thik tree bain't Mr. Bugby.'

The baby still cried.

Mrs. Chick had bent her head and whispered into the shawl, as though afraid some one might hear her. ' Bide still, will 'ee, or go into box where Mother do stay so quiet.'

Happening at that moment in the drive to remember the bottle of milk the town ladies had given to her, Mrs. Chick fed little Pim. The horse had settled itself into a steady trot, and the summer fields and the cool green hedges went slowly by. Mrs. Chick slept contentedly, until she was awakened by the wheels of the hearse going over the rougher stones of the Madder lanes.

She waked then a little wonderingly, and looked at the coffin. Arriving at the village itself, she was fully aware of the awe and glory that her situation would inspire in the minds of the onlookers, and so she put her hat straight and pulled her blouse a little differently, in case the grave-digger might chance to look at her. . . .

## INNOCENT BIRDS

And now the baby was being fed again, and was certainly worth looking at, and Pim looked at it with much curiosity and wonder. Though now and again, as though to try a comparison in family matters, he would regard the baby in the one grand picture possessed by the Chicks—the Holy Child and its parents, surrounded by brown leaves. There was a baby too, and a fine one, and Pim all but asked the father of Jesus a question, because his long beard looked so wise, when the milk came to an end.

When that was over, Pim had certainly compelled himself to believe that the baby upon Mrs. Chick's lap was a baby ; though still he was utterly undecided as to what part he had played to get it there.

But seeing that it was hidden in the shawl again, Mr. Pim began to note, this time with a sure personal interest, the doings of little Mother Maud, hoping that she had made preparations for him as well as for the baby.

For although John Pim had his own cottage to go to—next to a little railed paddock, where Farmer Barfoot's prize bull, Frederick, used to be put to bellow and to meet the cows—yet he had given Maud to understand that he wasn't going there again, 'to bide lonely,' but intended, addressing a daisy in the meadow, 'to stay where thik babe do go to.'

When tea was laid, Mr. Pim counted the cups upon his fingers. He did this because he could

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never get any sum right in his head. When he found by going over them twice that the fourth cup was really there, he nodded in a friendly way at the table, as though to say, 'Thik pretty cup be set out for thee, John Pim.'



*Chapter viii*

MR. THOMAS TUCKER

MR. TUCKER had, in his younger days, been rammed into the Church by his father, Dr. Tucker, in the same sort of way that a charge of powder might have been rammed into a new sporting gun by Coke of Norfolk when he went out to shoot the sparrows. Once safely rammed down into what was more like a watchman's blunderbuss than an ordinary gun, Mr. Thomas Tucker commenced to look through the wide bell-shaped muzzle at a very strange show indeed—the inhabited world. The more he looked, the more he wished to understand what he saw ; but this, from the rammed position he was in, was near impossible. And so all he could do was to try not to show too much astonishment at all that happened, and to keep very tight and sure the one opinion that he arrived at, after watching all the muddle, which was ‘that children should never be interrupted when they were playing.’

In appearance Mr. Tucker was well rounded, and his look was that of a man who is astonished and interested at the same moment. His bald head was good-tempered, and he nearly always carried his hat in his hand, as he did when he entered the churchyard for Mrs. Pim's funeral.

## MR. THOMAS TUCKER

Indeed, Solly had always believed a story that Mrs. Crocker had once told him, that one day in Dodderdown certain small children had lost the ball they were playing with by throwing it into the ivy that covered an old barn, and Mr. Tucker coming by, and being sorry for their sad looks, gave them his own head to roll down the street.

Once in times past, so people said who knew Weyminster, Mr. Tucker had made advances to Miss Pettifer, even though that lady was no friend to his friend, Mrs. Crocker. But those days were far off now, and Mr. Tucker had grown to love Solly's pinks better than the lady, and he would kneel and drink in their flavour in a more abandoned manner than Solly himself.

Besides the sweetness of the pinks, Mr. Tucker, inquisitive, as all honest folks are, would always want to know, when he called at Gift Cottage, what text for the day Mr. Solly had taken from the Americans.

He was nearly as interested about them as Solly was himself, though he had no very clear idea as to how the Americans behaved themselves, except that in olden times they planted their gardens with maize corn and burnt the witches, and that now a certain day comes in June when they take off their felt hats and put on straw ones.

Mr. Tucker was pleased with Solly's peaceful garden ways ; and when Solly told him what he

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had really come to Maddar to look out for, Mr. Tucker nodded his head knowingly and said 'he hoped the gift would be a nice one.' But if Solly had his secret, Mr. Thomas Tucker had his too, and every one wanted to know what that was. True, it was but a book, with a home-made cover, the original cover having been worn off by its owner's constant handling in private places. Mr. Tucker would only read his book in the quiet of the fields or, with the door safely locked, in his study at Dodderdown. And the more secret he was in his readings, the more the two parishes that were under his guardianship wished to know what the book contained. More than one resident attempted a guess, helped by the odd exclamation, overheard by some loiterer in the summer fields, when Mr. Tucker was reading under a shady hedge and thought himself alone.

'There be woon of they maidens in en,' Job Wimple had remarked to Minna, having overheard Mr. Tucker say with a gasp of astonishment as he put the book into his pocket again after reading in it, 'Well, I never did; who would have thought it, poor dear Mary!'

Susy, the church cleaner, once surprised Mr. Tucker reading his book before the service began, and heard him exclaiming, 'No, no, no, I can't believe that—I really can't; poor children, and they were only playing.'

''Tis a naughty story 'e do look at,' Susy told Mrs. Chick.

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Mr. Tucker, with the mysterious book in his pocket, now stood in the garden of Gift Cottage. Gnats played in the air, and the afternoon sun made Solly's red bean flowers very haughty, so that they despised the white ones. The little wind that was blowing made the aspen leaves in the Madder lanes whisper about Farmer Barfoot, who had been overheard to say that he would cut them all down in the fall. Mr. Tucker had come to Madder that afternoon to carry a new broom to Susy, because Mrs. Billy had complained that May, her niece, had got her frock dirty when she knelt in the back pew. There was no need for Susy to have a new broom, the hairs in the old one being still quite respectable ; but Mr. Tucker hoped that the sight and possession of a new broom would inspire her with a new desire to sweep. And so he gave the broom to Susy to admire, which, he learned later, was all she ever did with it.

Mr. Tucker always wished he had the wider experience of Mrs. Crocker when he looked at the world, and he wanted to be as good as she. He always felt, alas ! as every good man does, his own wickedness in a marked degree ; and even now, in such a peaceful place, and with Solly's moustache looking so restful, he was reminded of his sins. Sitting down upon the grass like a tailor, and bending his bald head so that he might touch the pinks with his nose, and delight himself wantonly with their sweetness, he

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inquired of Solly what the Americans had to say for themselves.

Mr. Solly replied very reverently that one of them had said—he had got the words from the book that very morning—that ‘he would allow no man of immoral character in his camp.’

Mr. Tucker, checking an immediate tendency to overbalance backwards, rose up hurriedly, and put on his hat to hide his confusion. Certainly those pinks had smelt more lovely than anything in this wicked world should do. The American had pulled him up just in time. But even then, saved as he was for the moment, the pinks appeared to be reminding him of the intention he had of going, after giving Susy the broom, into the Madder fields to read his book.

Leaving Gift Cottage, Mr. Tucker chose a place to read in, in the fields, a few yards from an old roller, that was fixed in the ground as though it grew there, pointing with its shafts at the blue sky. He sat down upon a bank dotted with small yellow flowers, with an ash bough above that shaded his head from the sun.

In such surroundings, where the summer loveliness curtsies like a pretty lady, even the most sinful book—and all Madder and Dodder-down believed Mr. Tucker’s to be a bad one—should be good reading. But no one would in the least have expected Mr. Tucker to do what he did do ; and that was, after reading a little, to close his book with a sigh and to say sadly,

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‘Poor young lady, she must have had a scare, when he came to her like that so suddenly.’ Mr. Tucker sighed again, put the book into his pocket, and shook his head and nodded at the small yellow flowers and at a large black-and-red bumble-bee.

The time was now come for the workmen in the fields to leave off their tasks. And Mr. Pim, who had been employed near, began to approach the roller, talking to himself; and behind him there came, though more slowly owing to his lame foot, Mr. Barfoot himself. As Pim walked he repeated to himself a word of useful meaning denoting a father, as though he doubted it, but wished he could persuade himself to believe it. When Mr. Pim reached the roller, he said wearily, ‘’Tain’t no good for I to be called Daddy when I bain’t woon.’ Without noticing Mr. Tucker, Pim rested upon the roller. Following with his eyes the upward pointing of the shafts, Pim addressed a question to the blue skies. ‘Be it only doing thik,’ he inquired, ‘that do bring a fine boy into world? Bain’t there nothing more that a poor man should ’ave done to she?’

A soft summer wind that had sprung up at the moment caused the chain that connected the roller shafts to sigh deeply, as though a rusty and aged voice replied, ‘Oh, foolish and unbelieving Pim, if only you knew what troubles were caused all over the world by just doing thik, you would



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go about like another St. Paul and preach continence.'

The farmer and his club foot—the same oddity that was drawn upon the gate of many meetings and possessed a name—now reached Pim, who, having received no very certain answer from the sky to his question, wished to inquire of his master, or rather to continue a conversation upon the same subject that they had touched upon in the stony turnip field earlier in the day ; although now Pim tried to draw out the wisdom of the farmer in lawyer-like manner.

'Do thik foot that be named Betty,' asked Pim, 'ever tread on a stone?'

'Sometimes it do,' replied the farmer, 'when I forget about she.'

'Do she ever come down upon a soft worm or a snake in grass?'

'No doubt she do,' said the farmer.

'Would Betty answer I if so be I did ask she something?' inquired Mr. Pim.

'If it bain't nothing very bad,' replied Mr. Barfoot, 'thee may ask.'

The bumble-bee buzzed by the roller, with honey-bag full, on its way to its nest the other end of the field, and Pim, looking down at the farmer's lame foot, asked his question. 'If it bain't all thik kissing and going, 'tis they tother doings, bain't en?' he inquired.

''Tis they tother doings,' said the farmer, moving away and carefully guiding Betty round

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a large flat stone. There is one character in French history—Panurge the Great—who used to ask questions, and who does a little, upon this warm summer evening, when the coming night creeps slyly about as though ashamed of himself, remind us of Mr. Pim, who found it so hard to believe that he had performed a husband's proper duties to poor Annie.

After watching the farmer for a little way guiding Betty over the stones, Pim turned and saw Mr. Tucker. Besides listening to his sermons in church, Mr. Pim had heard many reports about the wicked book that Mr. Tucker always carried about with him, and sometimes was caught reading.

' 'Tis most like,' said Pim, in the same sort of tone that he had spoken the word 'daddy' before the farmer joined him—' 'Tis most like that the clergy be the knowing ones about they bedtime doings, for bain't they always a-reading, an' all sorts be set down in they books. 'Tis most like that thik good clergyman, who do pay two servant maidens their wages at Dodderdown, do know more than poor Pim.'

Seeing that Mr. Tucker had opened a way himself for a little conversation by the simple process—for every little act in the country gives a chance for talk—of breaking off a large dock-leaf from the hedge to fan himself with, Mr. Pim approached the green bank and remarked gravely, 'They great leaves do grow easy; 'tain't no

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trouble to no woon to get a dock planted. Down in Chick's cottage,' said Mr. Pim, touching his hat to Mr. Tucker, and leaning restfully upon his hoe, 'they do call I Daddy sometimes, leastways Maud do, an' 'tis she that be master. But I don't never mind having done nothing that could get I a Daddy for a name. But farmer do say that 'tis they doings, and nothing more, that do make a married maiden to be a bearer.'

'I have never been married, Pim,' said Mr. Tucker.

'Bain't you never . . . !'

'No,' replied Mr. Tucker in a sad tone, because he couldn't help thinking of Solly's pinks, 'I have never experienced it, Pim. I once thought that Miss Pettifer . . . but she refused me, Pim, because she said that she would never marry a man who liked to see children playing. Miss Pettifer has fine ideas about work, Pim, though Mrs. Crocker, who has left this world, could never agree with her. No, Pim, I fear I cannot understand any more than you can how matters happen from which one is called "a Daddy." For this sort of information perhaps it might be necessary to go to the beasts of the fields; Bacon would certainly have done so. If you watch Frederick, the farmer's bull, he may help you to believe. Or else Mr. Solly might be asked to consult the Americans, who know a great deal.'

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Mr. Pim looked doubtful ; he could not believe that even an American, if he had held an Annie in his arms, and had known all her plump loveliness, would have, during those moments, with any certainty of observation, understood more about it all than he.

## *Chapter ix*

### FRED

MR. MOODY was a man of few words, but he had two interests in his life—the ladies and the letters.

His latter interest suitably became his occupation, for he was the Madder postman.

As to the former, he was modest about that, and regarded it, widely speaking, as a failure in virtue, for he had been strictly brought up as a Baptist.

Mr. Moody's cure for his own weakness was a novel one. If an opportunity occurred, he would stare hard at any undesirable old maid, so that if possible he might get the whole sex into his eye—as like that.

But alas for human endeavour ! that seeks a penance of its own without seeking first the helpful grace from above.

For this looking at old maids, and even hearing what a married woman, who was faded and thin, had to say, had a contrary effect to the hopes and wishes of Mr. Moody. For if ever he chanced to speak to Susy—a large being like a barrel hung with clothes, with a white face at the top—and got her safe in his eye, he would only turn with more zeal than ever to Eva Billy, and watch her

climb the bank after a flower : Miss Eva knowing all the time what his eyes were doing, and how lovingly he watched her. Annie Pim, aged twenty-nine in earthly years, had dwelt but three weeks in her heaven when Mr. Moody delivered a letter at the Chick cottage for Mr. Pim.

The letter, Mr. Moody regarded, as he brushed and scattered the grass seeds in the meadow path with his postman's boots, to be an important one.

He had spoken of it on his way through Madder as something better than the others, calling it ' the letter.'

He had informed Mr. Solly, who was standing in his garden looking up at Madder hill as if he were praying—and there is no reason why we should say that he wasn't—that Pim had a fortune left him from 'is cousin the horse-dealer.'

' Who lives in America,' said Solly simply. Mr. Moody closed the gate.

When Mr. Pim returned from carting Farmer Barfoot's hay, he received his letter from Maud Chick.

' Now don't 'ee go losing the letter, our baby's daddy,' said Maud sternly.

Mr. Pim took the letter in his hand, and replied ' No,' with a sad shake of the head that evidently referred to the last word Maud had used. After looking at the letter for a moment or two, as became its importance, though with the writing upside down, Pim put it deep into his trouser pocket for safety, ate his tea in thoughtful



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bites, took up his hat as though he wondered what it was, and went out to the meadow gate, where he hoped to find some one who could read.

While Mr. Pim was moving his legs slowly towards the meadow gate, Solly was watering his flowers at Gift Cottage. He used the large garden water-can that his aunt had left to him, that sprayed the water all about in a pretty stream of living pearls.

When Solly watered his columbines he thought about God. He was thankful to his aunt for giving him a mission in life : to watch for God's gift. Solly was a kind one ; he was also a very babe in the world's doings. His moustache looked dreamy and his eyes grey and wondering. Only once had Solly turned from the sheltering wings of his aunt to wander, but he returned soon again with that tormenting illusion called Love broken for ever.

The Weyminster dogs had barked loudly that day, so that even Aunt Crocker had looked out of her window and told her nephew, who was weeding the garden path, that she thought the gipsies were about.

Solly, foolishly, without knowing the danger he was in, looked out of the gate to see what time it was by the clock in the town gardens.

The clock struck four. The dogs barked louder than ever. A young gipsy girl, clad in a red cloak, came swaying along the road kicking up her feet.

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As soon as she came to Mrs. Crocker's villa, she danced to Solly, who was still gazing at the town clock as though he hadn't even heard it strike four.

Solly turned from the clock to the girl. Her feet went higher. Her red cloak was blowing, her other garments were but scanty, and she was plump though lightsome.

The town dogs barked.

The girl came near to Solly and smiled. Solly asked her in a trembling voice whether she was married.

The girl shook her head, laughed, and showed her fine white teeth.

'May I go with you?' Solly asked. The girl nodded, and Solly kissed her, never noticing that Miss Pettifer passed by at the moment holding a scented handkerchief to her nose, as though all gipsies had the plague.

Mr. Solly walked by the girl's side and away from the town.

The first real thing that he noticed when they reached Wiscoomb Common, where the gipsies camped, was a drop of rain. The drop of rain fell upon his forehead, and more followed.

Mrs. Crocker had taught Solly to fear two important things in this world. God was one of them, damp clothes was the other.

Beside the gipsy van Solly kissed the girl again.

She laughed, and taking up a dead rabbit she began to skin it.

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Solly looked at her hands.

He looked at other things too.

A man, a tall gipsy, had come near, and was exchanging pretty words, every one of them oaths, with the foulest looking old woman that Solly had ever seen in his life, who sat in the van. Once you notice things, there is no end to it. Near to the van there was a tent made of sacking, tied upon upright sticks. When Solly inquired of the tall man where he could sleep for the night, the man pointed to this tent. It looked very damp.

The company sat over the rabbit—half cooked in a pot that had never really boiled—and ate it.

The old woman in the van threw out the rabbit's leg that had been given her, because she couldn't bite the flesh off it. The leg fell in Solly's lap. After supper the girl climbed into the van, showing her legs to Solly, though he never looked at them.

As he crawled under the sacking, he heard her cursing the old woman, and reminding the world in general that if the old woman had been a man something better might have been happening.

Solly slept for a little under the sacks, and dreamt that he was being married to Nancy, the pretty gipsy, in a thunderstorm, with bats flying about, and that he was eating unripe blackberries for the wedding breakfast.

After this dream, that only troubled him, Solly woke up and lay thinking. The sacking dripped. The gipsy who lay beside Solly grunted in his

dreams like a boar pig ; sometimes he swore and threw his arms about. A wet piece of sacking blew loose and flapped in Solly's face.

Mr. Solly crept out from under the sacks. He decided that besides fearing God and the damp, he would also fear love. He always intended to love sweet Nancy in future, but at a safer distance.

For some while Solly had wandered about the common in the darkness and rain ; but at last he found the road to Weyminster.

When he reached the town the dogs began to bark again.

He knocked softly at his aunt's door, and waited patiently for her to open it to him.

While he waited, the clock in the gardens struck four.

The next day Solly asked his aunt why she hadn't added love to her list of things to be feared.

'Because love is related to death,' replied Mrs. Crocker. . . .

After watering his flowers at Madder, Solly now thought of his text for the day—

'The war came to an end, as wars even then required to do.'

Solly was glad to hear that it did end, for if the cannon and the soldiers had come as far as Madder, they might have disturbed the peace of his columbines ; or if the season was autumn, and he was picking the dried pods, saved for seed, of his runner beans, it would be unpleasant to hear

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the ships—‘grim, silent, ominously near’—letting off their guns. ‘Even supposing they were doing it in play,’ thought Mr. Solly, ‘the noise might bring down the rainstorms, and with such a melody in the air God could never be expected to descend upon Madder hill.’ In a friendly mood Mr. Solly walked out and came to the meadow gate; Pim at once handed him his letter unopened, because he feared that if he broke the envelope he might damage the contents, whatever they happened to be. Mr. Chick, who had come to the gate as fate directed him, looked gloomily at a little white stone upon the ground that distantly reminded him of a bantam’s egg that Maud had once given him for his tea. Chick’s gloom had come upon him because Job had remarked that one day he intended to teach him the art of grave-digging, ‘in case I be ever lamed or hurt, for folk do all want to be buried when they be dead.’

Chick, in order to protect himself from even the thought of such a contingency, moved further from Wimple, who stood there too, and nearer to Mr. Solly.

The letter was from Miss Pettifer, and between its leaves, folded as nicely as a wedding-dress, was the undertaker’s bill for £23, 2s. 5d.

To do honour to herself and to certain other town ladies who had taken an interest in the fright and death of poor Annie, Miss Pettifer had arranged that the conveyance to carry the

body should be no common waggon. She had even promised Mr. Barking to obtain the money from Pim—she had heard of his honesty from Annie—and to pay the bill herself in instalments.

‘I expect you will be so good as to pay me back,’ was how the letter ended.

While a listless summer wind was blowing, Solly explained to Pim that Miss Pettifer expected him to pay to her, taking so much a week out of his wages, the bill for his wife’s funeral.

Mr. Pim’s other doubts being set aside at the moment by the interested way Job Wimple and Chick were looking at him, as though £23, 2s. 5d. were hanging from his whiskers, he easily decided that instead of handing to Mrs. Chick one pound a week for his board, he would give her ten shillings and hand the rest to Miss Pettifer, but without asking her his usual question.

The Madder meadows were now coloured by the soft green light of evening. Outside the Chick cottage Mother Maud was nursing little Pim. Polly Wimple was playing at lying on the grass, holding her hands behind her and stretching out her legs to see what a big girl she was getting. The baby upon Maud’s lap held out his hands and crowed to Polly.

‘The flowers at Gift Cottage have names,’ said Mr. Solly, who watched the children lovingly. ‘And the Americans have names too. There are pinks and columbines and beans in the garden ;



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and Stonewall Jackson, Alexander Hamilton, and Mrs. Greene in America. Aunt Crocker taught me to call the great Creator of all the worlds by name too. Even when I was quite a little boy she told me His name. Good Mr. Tucker names our Saviour in church, and I have even heard Mr. Pim called "Daddy."

There is Maud—a mother to all babies—and there is Polly Wimple, plump as a pert robin, but what name can I give to the baby ?

Mr. Solly asked this question of Pim, who remained very thoughtful and silent for some moments.

Even though he doubted what he had done, here was this child at Mrs. Chick's. Pim saw Maud carry it in, and decided that it should be named. Everything in the world had a name; as Mr. Solly had said, you couldn't go on calling a baby 'thik toad' all its life; and even 'toad' was a name.

Mr. Pim wished to find a name for his son. If he could be a boy again with Minna under that pink May bush in the fields, she might have told him one. And there was his wedding night: something ought to come up in his mind from that night time, some name to call his son.

Annie hadn't been flurried or excited; she had just laid herself down, soft and sleepy and glad to be there. . . .

When a midnight star, who only believed in

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the existence of one cowman and a shepherd in all Madder, was high in the heavens, Mr. Pim left all the warmth of fair Annie, and opened the window and looked out. He looked out because he wanted advice ; he wanted to see Minna, who might tell him something.

The moon was in the sky, as well as the midnight star, though low down, and cast a pale and deathly whiteness over the meadows. The line of Madder downs, as well as the moon, stared at Pim, who stared back uneasily at the downs ; because there was something about those downs that was so utterly different, seen as he was seeing them, from the soft living bed of feathers that seemed all Annie. Pim looked at the hills and at the meadows too, as though they mocked him in a cold manner. They appeared unfriendly to him, as well as to his question, with the moon making queer shadows ; so that Pim couldn't help thinking that the night should keep its chilling secrets a little more to itself.

He was glad to turn from nature and to look down into Farmer Barfoot's yard.

A cow was standing up in the yard—a large quiet creature—amiable and gentle. The bull was lying down. The cow licked the bull's flanks and pushed it gently with its horns. The bull did not move.

‘ What be looking at, out of window ? ’ Annie asked.

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‘Farmer’s bull Frederick bain’t a-knowing more than I,’ replied Pim, creeping back to her so as to avoid a moonbeam.

. . .

‘Fred be a boy’s name, bain’t en?’ Pim asked Mr. Solly, remembering the bull.

‘Yes, ’tis,’ said Job Wimple, before Mr. Solly could reply. ‘For thik wold skull I did throw out of grave where Mrs. Pim were to go were Fred Barker’s, so Susy did say.’

Pim nodded his appreciation of Wimple’s concrete knowledge and looked into the fields. Maud had appeared again, and was leading Polly home by the hand, telling her as they went along, while Miss Polly ate of the flowers, that no little maid should lie out like she had done, so naughtily, in grassy meadows. When the children were gone, Farmer Barfoot took their place, as something to be seen that moved, giving the interest that any human being or beast of the fields always gives to idle watchers, only by moving from one visible point to another in country places.

Farmer Barfoot came slowly across the meadow. He rested Betty twice on the journey. He intended—and so did Betty—to hear what was being said by the gate before the company departed. When two or three were gathered together, here or elsewhere, Farmer Barfoot liked to be there too; for he was one of those who,

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having brought an oddity into the world, his Betty, liked to have her talked about.

‘If they bain’t talking of women,’ he would say, looking down at his foot, ‘it may be pigs or radishes they be telling of.’

‘’Tis about Pim we be speaking,’ said Chick, when the farmer drew near.

‘Yes,’ said Wimple. ‘An’ Pim do carry pounds, shillings, and pence in ’is pocket, and ’ave give a name to thik little toad Maud Chick do look to.’

‘Though ’e be come funny, ’e bain’t no toad,’ said Pim, a little haughtily.

‘No,’ said Wimple, thinking of the church service, ‘’e ’ave rose up into Fred.’

*Chapter x*  
'BEWARE'

TEN years of Madder life passed smoothly. Quickly gone these years were, though the days and hours went slow enough. This is often a peculiarity of country time, these slow-moving days and swift-hurrying years. The phenomenon has been referred to by Crabbe the poet, who could write better tales than sermons, as his parishioners evidently thought when they pealed the church bells in fine holiday fashion on the day he left their village.

The seasons had passed by in Madder very much as Thomson tells us they do, with very little variation in their behaviour : the summers always going away like beautiful white birds with soft downy breasts, while two of the ten winters provided an interest—created on purpose for Mr. Chick—in the form and substance of ice four inches thick on Farmer Barfoot's horse-pond. Mr. Chick broke the ice with a long pole that he kept on purpose for this use in a corner of the stable. Even with all the experience that he had gained during these years past and gone, when Mr. Pim first saw his son Fred run after Polly Wimple in the lane he opened his eyes very wide indeed ; though at the moment he

felt that no new light was thrown upon the mystery—and science calls it so too—of generation. Yet Polly resembled the Minna of earlier days so truly by the way she kicked up her heels so that her frock was tossed about, and then even more unforgettably when she threw herself upon the grassy bank and hid her laughing eyes with her hair.

And there was Fred standing beside her, who looked the very same sort of being that Pim had once seen, when he was a boy, reflected in the still river pool near to the stepping-stones when he looked for minnows.

‘I bain’t a-walking backwards, be I, in these Madder grounds?’ Mr. Pim inquired of Maud Chick when he reached home one day.

‘’Tis most like thee will be,’ Maud replied, ‘if thee’s forgot they sticks ’ee promised.’

Although so strange a doubt came upon Pim as to whether he was walking into the past or the future, his son Fred, by growing into such a big boy, with a round face, a head of curls, and fine blue eyes, proved that he at least was going forward in life’s journey. Even before the ten years had passed, Fred had shown a happy interest in Polly. There was something mysterious about Polly, something that Fred wished to know a little more of.

Besides Polly and the mystery that ran about with her, showing itself in white dashes sometimes, there was, and all to amuse little Fred, the



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interesting art of simple addition and the excitement of throwing his cap into the air, both to see how high they would go—the cap and the counting—and whether the cap could be caught when it fell. Before he began going to school Maud had taught Fred how to count up to a hundred ; and so she handed him, a round plump little boy with cheeks like ripe apples, to Polly Wimple to take with her, Polly having already trod the educational road for two years. ‘Thee’ll lose thik cap in they high hedges a-throwing of en, and I bain’t a-going to no church wi’ a bare-headed boy to be married,’ Polly remarked to Fred one day when they went to school together.

During play-time that same morning, Fred, for reasons of his own, first visited Gift Cottage, and then played truant in the churchyard until school was over. Finding him out at last after hunting all round the village, and even looking under Susy’s wide skirts, where children had been known to hide, Polly said ‘she wouldn’t love him no more if he went away losing himself.’

‘But I haven’t lost myself,’ Fred replied ; ‘I’ve been a-counting.’

‘Counting,’ sniffed Polly contemptuously. ‘I thought thee’d a been a-flinging ’ee’s cap up.’

‘I’ve been an’ counted,’ said Fred very gravely, ‘they trees of Mr. Solly’s and wold God’s grave-stones. Mr. Solly’s trees be ten, and there be

thirty stones, not a-counting they ten little crosses where cats be buried.’

‘They crosses be for babies,’ said Polly.

‘Ten of they, then,’ said Fred, ‘an’ thirty great stones, counting by ones.’ . . .

The morning after little Fred had been found counting the grave-stones, Mr. Solly sat down in a thoughtful frame of mind to eat his bread and milk. He was sure, as he cautiously sipped the milk to see how hot it was, that something important must have happened in the night. He knew that he had closed the book that was all about the Americans when he went to bed ; but it now lay open upon the table at page 146. Who had opened it ? Although Solly wasn’t the only person in the world, he was the only person in Gift Cottage.

Solly considered the matter. There was but one conclusion he could arrive at—that his aunt, Mrs. Crocker, had come down from heaven on purpose to tell him, by means of the Americans, of something that was going to happen. He moved his finger down the page as carefully as he had touched the hot milk with his tongue. His finger stopped of its own accord at these words : ‘From his mast-head Captain Broke watched anxiously the movement of the hostile ship.’ Mr. Solly thanked his aunt for her warning, and went out into his garden.

The time of year was the fall, though Solly, with the doings of the Americans so alive in his

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mind, had forgotten it. He expected to see his pinks in full bloom, but alas ! they were all faded and dead.

That was a sad sight for Solly, but it could not be helped.

He prayed ; that is to say he looked up at the hill, for that was his prayer. He hoped to see the Being whose life is everlasting, and who had promised Aunt Crocker to give a gift to Madder.

The hill was wrapped in a garment of mist. Was God there? Perhaps He was. Or was the hill become the mast-head for Solly to climb in order to see the hostile ship he had read about, perhaps? Solly trembled; though he had climbed the hill a number of times before and had never seen anything there, he believed firmly in his aunt's vision, and was also well aware that God chooses His own time to pay His visits. Solly left his garden and walked through the mud of the Madder lanes. Three little children out to play were looking up at a boy's cap in the hedge. Near to them there was another child—a boy—who was walking along by the hedge and counting out aloud.

Mr. Solly took down the cap with his stick, and asked whose it was.

' 'Tis Fred Pim's,' replied Polly Wimple, to whom Solly had spoken ; ' 'e did fling en there, and now 'e be a-counting all the little birds in hedge.' Solly gave the cap to Polly and passed on.

He crossed the little bridge over the brook, in which forget-me-nots and water-cress grow in summer and rushes in winter. A pert moor-hen crept out of the rushes and looked inquisitively at Mr. Solly. When he was fairly on his way up the hill, his moustache drooped the more because the way was steeper.

Solly penetrated the mist cautiously and looked with hope and awe at the thorn-bush that his aunt had told him of. A large bird flew out of it, that wasn't a rook. Solly started. Where God was expected he knew the Devil might appear too ; for where God goes the Devil goes.

Solly waited uneasily beside the bush. There was no wind. The mist hung like the shroud of a dead Madder shepherd pinned up badly by Mother Chick.

Solly listened ; he was upon the Madder mast-head, and though he couldn't see any hostile ship coming, he could listen for one. From below, in the village, Mrs. Chick's voice came to him strangely clear. He heard her say : ‘ They did tell I in town that Landlord Bugby, who did fright poor Annie to death wi' 'is funny ways, be a-going to come to “ Silent Woman.” ’

Solly next heard the sound of a plough being driven and horses being spoken to by Carter Chick in Farmer Barfoot's fields. The plough creaked, and then all was still again. Chick had stopped the horses.

But still Solly listened.

## INNOCENT BIRDS

From the Weyminster direction, where the main road clung to the valleys, he distinctly heard the trotting of a horse. This sound was unusual except upon market-day. There was something odd about it. The horse appeared to be saying a word with its feet.

Solly thought that the word was 'Beware.' Mr. Solly came down slowly from Madder hill. In the lanes he hoped to meet Fred Pim, but was disappointed. He hoped to see Fred, because he very much wished to know how many little birds there were in the hedge.

Near to Gift Cottage he was aware that some one was sitting upon the doorstep. Solly was naturally a little excited that morning ; and considering whom he had expected to see on Madder hill, one isn't surprised. He looked anxiously at the person upon his doorstep, and was relieved to see that it was only Mr. Tucker. Mr. Tucker was reading his book with his eyes close to it and his head bent forward, for he was near-sighted. His hat lay beside him, and his bald head shone in the cloud of mist that had followed Solly down the hill.

When Solly opened the gate, Mr. Tucker put the book into his pocket, and inquired of Solly whether he had seen old Susy anywhere.

'I want to give her this,' he said. Mr. Tucker held up a large white new duster as big as a hand towel. 'Mrs. Billy says the church is dirtier than a dog's kennel, where the fleas hop about. I've

‘ BEWARE ’

looked everywhere in the village, but I can’t find Susy.’

‘ Perhaps she’s in the church,’ suggested Solly.

‘ No,’ said Mr. Tucker, ‘ Susy can’t be there, because as the church is never cleaned, she can’t be in there cleaning it.’

What with the odd tales in his book and Susy’s conduct, Mr. Tucker walked rather sadly down Solly’s path, putting the large duster round his neck as though it were a muffler.

He stopped silent beside the dead pinks ; he was trying to remember some lines of poetry that the sight of them should bring to his mind : then he said, putting his hands behind him and leaning forward a little :

‘ Brave flowers—that I could gallant it like you,  
And be as little vain !  
You come abroad, and make a harmless show,  
And to your beds of earth again.  
You are not proud : you know your birth :  
For your embroider’d garments are from earth.’

Looking up from the dead pinks, Mr. Tucker turned to Solly and asked him what the Americans were doing. Solly told him of his text for the day, and also how he had climbed up Madder hill into the mist, and had seen a large bird fly out of a bush that was once a burning one.

When Solly finished telling his story, both he and Mr. Tucker stood still and listened. The



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mist hid all the village except the near trees, that looked like mountains.

A sound came to them from the lane that led down the hill into Maddar. It was the trotting of a horse.

*Chapter xi*

MR. BUGBY FINDS A  
BLACK GLOVE

NO horse can trot along a road with a trap behind it without some reason or other for its being there.

The reason why this horse sounded so clear, that its trotting even reached to Madder hill, was, besides the stillness of the day, Mr. Bugby's apparent desire to find a new residence out of town, that he hoped would be the Madder inn.

' 'Tis nice to be looked at by the women,' Mr. Bugby said to his wife that same morning after breakfast.

' But it bain't always so nice to be too much talked about.'

' They girls,' said Mr. Bugby, seeing two pass the inn windows, as though to remind him of their presence in the world—' They girls bain't like they used to be in this little town.'

' I can mind the time,' continued Mr. Bugby, ' when I could follow a maid into they shelters and do what I were minded, wi' nothing said ; but now, 'tis only pleasure they women do think of.'

Whether or no Mrs. Bugby felt herself to

## INNOCENT BIRDS

be one of those who preferred her own pleasure to Mr. Bugby's manners, we cannot say, but at least she took the blame to mean her—and wept.

'I be a man,' said Mr. Bugby, seeing her tears, and being rendered more talkative by them, 'that do frighten they women, for I be free an' easy wi' me happy manners when I be out.'

Mr. Bugby, as though to illustrate his habits, pursued a fly upon the window and crushed it with his thumb.

'I like a maid,' said Mr. Bugby, 'who be simple—"Innocent birds." I did see they writ down as in a book Squire Kennard did leave behind under parlour table. I do like they "Innocent birds."'

Mr. Bugby looked at his wife, and being a natural philosopher, he opened upon a new subject.

'The grave,' said Mr. Bugby, killing another fly, 'be a good kind second husband to a married 'oman. An' a deep garden well mid do instead of parson at thik wedding.'

Mr. Bugby stood for a moment with his hand upon the handle of the door that he had opened.

'Brandy,' he said, 'be a nice comforting drink for a poor man wi' a wold hag 'oman tied to 'im. And a maiden wi' crimpy hair, and wi' a little lace to they clothes that do tear easy, be a pretty drink

## MR. BUGBY FINDS A BLACK GLOVE

too. Why, I do believe me wife be a-crying,' said Mr. Bugby, raising his eyes to the ceiling in utter astonishment; 'an' bain't I going to find she a deep well in a Madder garden, and yet she be a-crying!'

Mr. Bugby softly closed the door, as if he did not wish to interrupt by a loud bang the sobs of his wife.

'I be what I be,' said Mr. Bugby, smiling to himself as he harnessed the horse in the inn yard. 'An' a man's nature be as the Lord made it, whether 'e be young or old.'

Driving along past the town clock, Mr. Bugby returned the friendly nod of a policeman with a gesture that made the policeman smile—a smile that would have been a laugh had not the officer noticed the Mayor of the town walking at a little distance. Walking, too, a little way behind the Mayor was a girl, whose shoes were trodden down at the heels. She hurried, rather as though trying to hide herself from the eyes of other women. Mr. Bugby smiled at this girl, who hid her face in her hand and crouched down in a doctor's doorway until Mr. Bugby went by.

Mr. Bugby liked misty weather, and he drove through the mist smiling. On the road he thought first of his wife and then of other women. He thought of his wife as being already in a Madder grave, and of the other women in more lively situations.

Mr. Bugby's face, that was large and heavy,

## INNOCENT BIRDS

though not ill-looking, and ornamented with a moustache proper to the kind of man that he was, grew somewhat pale with these and other reflections. And his eyes, the expression of which a magnified spider upon a pin might have been proud of, blinked wickedly. Though not a very healthy man, Mr. Bugby always left a reserve of energy in the background ready for use when required. To any ordinary person that he met, or served drink to, he appeared as simple and commonplace as any other innkeeper who prefers a pretty barmaid to a plain one.

Mr. Bugby's horse was a young mare, though a very quiet one. And when she turned into the Madder lane and suddenly stopped dead, Mr. Bugby naturally wished to know the reason. The reason was an ash tree, now bare of leaves, that grew in the bank just inside the Madder lane. This tree had bare arms, with twigs on the ends like claws. These arms reached out over the road in a nasty way, as though they wanted to catch hold of some one.

Mr. Bugby viewed the horse's behaviour with displeasure, and the trees with interest. That something else beside himself was able to bring the terror of the unseen even into a horse's mind, interested him.

Lily had crouched upon the pavement, just like his mare, when she had seen him drive by. Had he been walking he would have taken away her hands and made her look at him, if only for

## MR. BUGBY FINDS A BLACK GLOVE

the pleasure of reminding himself how she had looked once in the bar parlour.

‘Pain,’ thought Mr. Bugby, following the reasoning culled from that adventure, ‘conquers fear.’ Were he that ash tree and the horse a maid, if he could lay hold of her and hurt her, she would soon begin to move a little though she were crying. Mr. Bugby nodded in a friendly way at the tree, as though to encourage it in the kindly act of driving away the fear of the horse by giving it pain. As the tree did nothing, and the mare still refused to move, Mr. Bugby felt the inevitable necessity of acting the man in the tree.

In order to do so, in a manner he thought the most proper, he got down from the cart, and picked up a strong stump of ash that had been blown from the tree.

With this weapon—for his whip he had considered too slender, and besides, he wished the tree to do it—he began to beat the horse about the head and eyes.

If the fear had been great, Mr. Bugby wisely decided that in order to defeat it the pain must be greater.

Having reached to blood, and bethinking himself that all policemen were not as friendly as that smiling one, and that a country officer might, having more knowledge of animals, be less able to believe Mr. Bugby’s excuse that the horse had been standing upon its head and so had got scratched, he stopped his blows.



## INNOCENT BIRDS

Stepping into the trap again, Mr. Bugby drove on as though no tree was there ; for the horse passed it as if its eyes, so blinded by blows, were quite incapable of seeing anything at all, which was indeed true.

Mr. Bugby trotted his horse pleasantly down the Madder lane and turned into the inn yard.

All was silent there, as became the inn's name, except the sign-board ; and that creaked mournfully to and fro, blown by the autumn wind, as though it called the attention of any passer-by to the deserted state of the bar parlour, and the sad emptiness of the pewter mugs, hung in a row and covered with cobwebs. The garden was sad and deserted too, but covered with weeds instead of cobwebs, over which a hawk hovered, waiting for the little birds, in the same amiable manner as the spiders waited in their webs for the little flies.

In the backyard of ' The Silent Woman ' there were scattered about broken bottles and old tins, that said, as plainly as any rubbish could, that the place had had no human attention for a long while. Mr. Bugby tied his mare to a post, on which was an iron ring intended for this purpose. He then looked into the garden, hoping to notice something there that he wished to see. But the bindweed covering all so effectually, Mr. Bugby turned back into the yard, and the hawk flew away, evidently regarding the innkeeper, though quite wrongfully, as an enemy.

## MR. BUGBY FINDS A BLACK GLOVE

In the yard Mr. Bugby kicked a jam-pot to pieces, because he thought that it got in his way on purpose, and then looked about for the person that the agent had told him had charge of the key.

Over her own garden hedge, he saw Mrs. Chick as the person he had been referred to, who was spreading out her arms like a swan's wings and hanging underclothes upon a line, with Maud standing near and telling her how to hang them properly.

Those ten years that we have already mentioned had been kind to Mother Maud in a way she liked them to be, each year having given her a present of a little more maidenly well-being ; and together they had made her very ready for what she wanted more than anything else in the whole world—a baby of her own. Maud knew very well, and she liked the knowledge of it, that she was ready. Her dreams had told her so, and when she undressed and dressed she knew the dreams told her the truth.

But though Maud was ready, she wasn't in the least impatient ; for everything that she learned to do in ordinary household ways, or in tending children, made her feel the more safe and sure that ' it ' would be well nursed and looked after when it came.

Even the whitening of the steps and the brushing of Mr. Pim's Sunday coat had to do with ' it,' because everything in the way of tidiness or cleanliness was to Mother Maud a

## INNOCENT BIRDS

preparation for the child's arrival. She hardly thought at all of the man, for as a rule a country girl, when she is willing, gets married easily enough.

When Mr. Bugby asked Mrs. Chick for the key, Mrs. Chick looked at him with interest, because he had frightened poor Annie to death ; and she secretly hoped, at no very far distant time, to discover how he did it, if only by the simple means of his doing it again more openly to another lady.

' Thee be new landlord, bain't 'ee ? ' remarked Mrs. Chick, handing Mr. Bugby the key that Maud had brought to her from the cottage. Mrs. Chick nodded in a friendly way to the creaking sign-board. She folded her arms, so that her bosoms became more prominent ; and she hoped that the sight of them might beguile Mr. Bugby into trying to frighten her too. But Mr. Bugby's eyes were elsewhere ; he had seen Maud—such a young girl—go into the house and return with the key. Mr. Bugby liked the look of Maud, and his eyes kept pace with her until she disappeared again into the cottage. Miss Maud had turned his way long enough for him to see and to desire a nearer view of that rounded and girlish body that, with pretty Maud, waited so quietly for what she wanted.

But business was business with Mr. Bugby, and he hoped to see himself soon as a more

## MR. BUGBY FINDS A BLACK GLOVE

pleasant fellow—without his wife. What but his fate had brought him so nicely there to Maddar ; for was he not the one to frighten the maidens, and to hire a pretty house with an evil history for his wife to live in ?

That house should play his game as well as Maud, whom the Almighty had placed so near and given the liveliness of a young mouse to, on purpose that he, Mr. Bugby, should amuse himself with her. He had to go along his life's journey—so Mr. Bugby was wont to tell Mrs. Bugby when she reproached him for his conduct with many tears—‘ same as I be made.’ ‘ And,’ Mr. Bugby would add, looking up at the bar parlour ceiling, ‘ ’tain’t for a poor man to find fault wi’ ’is Maker.’

On the same day that Lily had been told by Mr. Bugby ‘ to go to workhouse ’—that was but a day before he made his Maddar journey—Mr. Bugby expressed himself in certain other wise and serious sentiments. ‘ A maiden,’ he said, ‘ that be plimmed an’ proper should be frightened by a nice man—’tis a beginning. For bain’t they always a-tempting of we wi’ their pretty looks and what they do show.’

Mr. Bugby continued the subject with a new inspiration. ‘ ’Twas God, weren’t en, that did fright sun above into shining ? ’E did but show ’Isself, an’ sun did catch a-fire. An’ so ’tis right for we men to fright a maid into tother matters. Though I be a poor landlord, I be

## INNOCENT BIRDS

Bugby wi' a liking, and I be made a man that do frighten—'twas a good home that Lily did come to.'

This last remark of Mr. Bugby's was made to confirm the truth of the advertisement that had brought Lily Parsons, whom Miss Pettifer had turned off without a character, to the Unicorn Inn.

And now, at Madder, kind fate had shown Mr. Bugby, Maud Chick, who was plimmed and proper too. . . .

As so interesting a person, who enjoyed so much local fame as the proud possessor of a mystery that frightened the women, stood talking to her, Mrs. Chick smiled pleasantly. She hoped that Mr. Bugby would hire the inn, but at the same time she was forced to tell the history of the house, even though it might send him away again, for she did not know how much he knew of it already.

' 'Twere a good house once,' said Mrs. Chick amiably, because Mr. Bugby now looked at her instead of at the doorway, where Maud had gone in. 'Folk did come by riding on horses, and did drop in those days, and motors did stop by twos and by threes—but all same, 'twas they wives that did suffer.'

Mr. Bugby lowered his eyes a little.

Mrs. Chick blushed.

Although she wasn't the kind of lady that his modest fancy liked the best, yet Mr. Bugby saw her as helping in a kind and motherly way—like

## MR. BUGBY FINDS A BLACK GLOVE

the 'One who set the sun a-burning'—to get him what he wanted. He let her talk, knowing that she wished to. 'There was poor Mrs. Poole that were took first,' continued Mrs. Chick, 'she that did use to carry a big red prayer book to church. Mr. Pink did come to Madder after t' other were gone, wi' a maid 'e did call 'is wife, an' she did wear a ring to prove what 'e did say were right. 'Twas woon of they colds that did carry she off. Mr. Told came next, brother to 'e that do live at Norbury. 'E did take inn for the sound of drink a-running. 'Twas a man that liked thik sound, were Mr. Told. 'E would set all they barrels a-dripping into quart cups, and would lie down in passage to hear they drops a-singing. 'Twas for to amuse 'isself that 'e did come to Madder. Mrs. Told were the woon for open-works. An' Chick did say to I at bedtime, "'Tain't I that be the woon to look at what they ladies do show; 'tis to drink beer that I do climb stile in hedge—'tain't to admire." But for all 'e did say, 'e know'd they stockings well enough. 'Twas well bucket that did rick she to grave. 'Twere a pity to bury she in they very stockings that Chick did admire.'

Mr. Bugby smiled. He was glad to hear that there was a well in the garden.

Mrs. Chick looked across the fields at Madder churchyard. She sighed. She felt sorry that Mrs. Told was dead, because she missed very



## INNOCENT BIRDS

much the merry tales that Mr. Chick used to bring to her from the inn.

The autumn wind, that had now partly cleared the air of mist, began more than ever to tease the sign of 'The Silent Woman' with spiteful gusts, blowing the board first one way and then the other, until it creaked loudly. As Maud didn't appear again, Mr. Bugby turned from Mrs. Chick, with a look as though he said, 'You're only another of them,' and, going to the inn door, he unlocked and opened it.

Inside the house there were signs that the last departure from those doors hadn't exactly been a merry one, but a silent, as rightly became the name of the inn.

The wearer of those open-worked stockings being carried away, her husband, Mr. Told, did not wish to return to his music again, and went off to his brother at Norbury to help with the hay crop.

Mr. Told had tried, the day before the funeral, to catch a new note from a barrel by making drop by drop fall into a pudding basin, but feeling that the beer had lost its harmony, he went upstairs and looked at his wife's face instead.

Mr. Bugby sniffed ; there was something in the smell of the room that pleased him—something that informed him that death had been there.

Besides the mugs, and the spiders, and the usual inn furniture, Mr. Bugby noticed, with the

## MR. BUGBY FINDS A BLACK GLOVE

natural interest of the new tenant, that something had been left behind by the old one upon the bar parlour table.

This was a black glove.

Although so much dust and dirt that befitted a deserted residence lay about, the general dustiness appeared to have avoided this black glove, that lay upon the table exactly as Mr. Told had left it.

Mr. Bugby tried the glove on—it might have been made for him.

By means of the glove his thoughts went further. He saw himself a widower. 'A widower,' he murmured, 'who be in need of a servant maiden.' He saw himself handing out beer to the bearers in the generous manner of a man who can do what he likes with his own. Perhaps Maud would be the servant to draw the drink, and talk about the poor drowned Mrs. Bugby, and about how kind she used to be, in mournful murmurs.

And afterwards, he would ask Miss Maud to step upstairs and put the glove in the dressing-table drawer.

Mr. Bugby's fancy followed her there.

*Chapter xii*

MISS PETTIFER COMES  
TO MADDER

IT was because Miss Pettifer bore a grudge against Madder that she wished to live there. Miss Pettifer always took a fine pride in this novel way of taking her revenge. She had practised it for years, and had found it very telling, as a means of utterly destroying her enemies ; or, if not quite that, of at least putting them into the right way of not repeating the same fault again.

If she heard that any friends had spoken against her, she would quarter herself upon them, with her green car and her walking-stick, until they chose to show by their behaviour to her that they repented.

Miss Pettifer wished to go to Madder because of Mr. Pim's honesty in paying the debt he owed for his wife's heaven. Mr. Pim, his own pride flattered to the highest when he sent each payment, had paid back to the town ladies, through Miss Pettifer, all that they had advanced.

Miss Pettifer herself had lent a little, but she had a soul—so she always said—that was above money ; and she had hoped that Pim would forget to pay. Miss Pettifer always had the true well-being of England imprinted upon her actions

## MISS PETTIFER COMES TO MADDER

in life. She hoped—and no doubt correctly—that if those other town ladies who had lent to Mr. Pim, and were very much poorer than she, lost their money, they would be forced to give their help or maid-servant margarine instead of butter.

Miss Pettifer believed that all servants should eat margarine, and she believed that she helped to save the empire from disaster by enforcing upon them this imperial duty. If Mr. Pim had not paid back that money to those poorer ladies, it would certainly mean that the fresh butter, ordered at Parly's, would be changed, and become margarine in those kitchen mouths. Besides blaming Mr. Pim, and all Madder too, in consequence of his honesty, she also blamed Mrs. Crocker, who, though dead, was always brought up in Miss Pettifer's mind to be bitten when anything annoyed her.

Miss Pettifer never forgot any person, whether dead or alive, who in times past had insulted her. She did not make clay images of them to stick pins into, because she could never have got a near enough likeness to please her taste, which was practical. Instead of doing that, she wrote their names, in a determined and practised hand, in her prayer book—that wasn't too small a one. She would also mix them, in a sacramental way, with her fried bacon for breakfast. Miss Pettifer had a happy appetite, as a healthy lady of sixty, with a very English mind, would be likely to

## INNOCENT BIRDS

have. And she liked fried bacon. And in order to make it taste the better, even though it might sometimes be a little burnt, she would put her enemies between the rashers and bite them too.

Although Miss Pettifer might now and again forget one or other of her enemies at breakfast time, she never forgot Mrs. Crocker, because Mrs. Crocker had once taken a servant into her home after Miss Pettifer had put the girl into the road.

Another nice one to bite was Mr. Tucker, who, besides Mrs. Crocker, helped her to digest her breakfast, because she bit it the more when the bacon was a little hard with him there. When she was younger Mr. Tucker had proposed marriage to her ; and Miss Pettifer had never expected him to take her first answer for a true no ; though Mr. Thomas Tucker, not wishing to be troublesome to so modest a lady, left her at that—though sadly.

Miss Pettifer attended church, as every woman does who believes in established gentility, and whose shoes are not too down at heel. When Miss Pettifer thought of God, she thought of Him as a Father who showed His temper to the wicked, His enemies, in very much the same sort of way as she did herself at breakfast time, and who would be sure to always keep His good things for Miss Pettifer.

Jesus she believed in too, and she liked to think how much He did—and was always going

## MISS PETTIFER COMES TO MADDER

to do—for His chosen. She regarded herself as one of those chosen ones, and she very much approved of those words of Jesus—and applied them indeed more closely than He perhaps ever meant them to be, to herself—when He said that He was come amongst men as ‘One who serves.’

Here upon earth Miss Pettifer knew, much to her continual annoyance—with Annie excepted—that good servants are very scarce. And in heaven, she feared, though the Rev. Haysom thought otherwise, they might be even scarcer.

And so what could be better and more hopeful to her future well-being than those Christ-like promises and sayings? If the Son of God, of His own free will, came down to earth to be a servant, He must have done so, reasoned Miss Pettifer, ‘because He liked the occupation.’ And what, then, could be more natural and more proper a corollary than that He would like to be a servant in heaven too?

With a little of her training given to Him free and for love, Miss Pettifer saw no reason why He shouldn’t learn to cook her heavenly rasher as she liked it done best, and also to answer the door to her friends and to wait at table in her mansion above.

When the lessons were read in church, Miss Pettifer always listened very eagerly for any qualifications other than those words about serving that Jesus might give utterance to in the



## INNOCENT BIRDS

Gospels. And hardly a chapter was read without some act or statement, or low servant-like doing, that showed how well He would do for her place above.

Besides wishing to be revenged upon the village in which honest Pim lived, she herself going there to live, there was also this servant reason for her moving to Madder. Miss Pettifer had always heard that servants grew up in the country : not quite like radishes, but still growing up into girls, with legs that could be made to run up and down stairs when Miss Pettifer's bedroom bell rang sharply, and Miss Pettifer's false teeth were safely lodged in her jaws and ready for remembering Mrs. Crocker.

How Annie Brine had ever grown plump in Miss Pettifer's service was a matter that Miss Pettifer herself could never understand. But she decided when Annie married that that sort of wanton fattening—really caused by Annie's own happy nature—should never happen again in her household ; though, after all, it had only helped to prove how nice and wholesome for servants cheap margarine was.

It was Miss Pettifer's intention as soon as she came to Madder to catch up from those country fields a girl who could work. Work ! That word was always in Miss Pettifer's mouth : it matched her false teeth, and she would use it upon every possible occasion. ' If only those girls would work at the laundry,' she would say,

## MISS PETTIFER COMES TO MADDER

‘ my best table-cloth would have come home in one piece instead of in two halves.’

Miss Pettifer brought in the same word upon many subjects besides the washing. She would use it about tombstones and blackbirds. A country churchyard always called it out, because the old tombstones of forgotten farmers tottered or leaned. ‘ The rector should raise them up again,’ Miss Pettifer had once said when she visited Shelton.

Even a slug in the town gardens gave her the chance of saying, when she saw it, ‘ If the blackbirds that live here would only think of doing a little work instead of singing ! ’

Miss Pettifer’s father had always sat in the same kind of chair, either at the office or at home, and was hardly ever seen out of it ; so that people supposed that where he went he carried his chair too, like a snail’s shell. It was a chair that had a mean look, though elbowed, and would creak loudly when any poor client attempted to approach Mr. Pettifer for money.

The lawyer died in it at the dinner-table, and when later six evil-looking chairs—all exactly alike—appeared one Saturday in Mr. Platt’s auction hall, the only person who bid for them was a gentleman who suffered from delusions, and who thought they were coffins.

As soon as they were gone, and her father too, Miss Pettifer began to count her money. She

## INNOCENT BIRDS

found herself rich in a provincial way, where a few hundreds a year count as a fortune.

A little time passed as time goes at Maddar. A few years went by, after Mr. and Mrs. Bugby settled at 'The Silent Woman,' and before Miss Pettifer came there to live.

Any new resident coming to Maddar would be sure to choose either the spring or the autumn as their time of arrival. And so it was April—and April with her usual cold wind and rain storms—when Miss Pettifer drove her green car to visit Mr. Thomas Tucker on her way to Maddar. Maddar rectory was already hers, by the legal signing of a stamped agreement sent by post, Mr. Tucker naturally not wishing to intrude after what had happened.

Upon the road, with her gloved hands upon the wheel, and her boot, for Miss Pettifer always wore boots, ready to press the brake, Miss Pettifer let her thoughts go to the sad state of the English nation, shown—always so truly sad to a lady of means—by the simple fact that servant girls in these days only grow in the most hidden places, under bridges, near dark trees, or in miry puddles. Miss Pettifer frowned. In the good old days they had grown everywhere, but now a nice lady was forced to go down upon her knees and dig after them, like a dog after truffles. And even then they were scraped out of the earth only aged fourteen or thereabouts, with generally a live louse or two in their heads, as well as

## MISS PETTIFER COMES TO MADDER

stealing ways and dirty underclothes. Such a one had Miss Parsons been, who left Miss Pettifer's margarine and dish-clout for her own home and the rather gruesome attentions—for he was the very gentleman who bought the lawyer's chairs—of her mother's lodger.

The first sight that she got of Mr. Thomas Tucker's garden gave Miss Pettifer a shock that she wasn't likely to forget for a day or two.

Mr. Tucker's garden showed the most unmistakable signs that children played there—played there, not once or twice a week, but every day. Everywhere there was the usual litter that village children leave behind them after they have been happy. There were little pieces of paper screwed up or left simply to blow about, that looked human, and, like snow in January, asked for more. When she saw the swings that hung from the strong boughs of some fine trees, Miss Pettifer felt as though some one had insulted her. She stopped ; each swing—and there were a score of them—mocked her. Miss Pettifer peeped into a laurel bush ; there was a nest inside, with little torn things hanging to the entwined boughs, that showed that small girls had been there. Miss Pettifer clenched her fist.

What Miss Pettifer expected happened when she reached Mr. Thomas Tucker's front door and pulled at the bell. No sound came at all. She had known that the bell must be a broken one if children play in the garden.

## INNOCENT BIRDS

Miss Pettifer used the knocker. She stood stiff and rigid, with her chin slightly raised, and listened. Inside the closed door a girl laughed, and something scampered. Footsteps ran upstairs, followed by laughter and the same scampering.

Miss Pettifer knocked repeatedly. She struck the door, and in her fancy she struck the head of a child with each knock. The laughter stopped, and she heard some one approach.

A girl without cap or apron, very prettily dressed, and looking as no servant could look 'and be honest,' thought Miss Pettifer, 'with those roses on her cheeks,' opened the door.

Miss Pettifer stepped back. Behind this unservant-like apparition there was another and a more wanton one, sitting upon the stairs in a very naughty and unabashed attitude, and whose name was Nellie Squibb. Nellie threw a little coloured ball at a fluffy kitten, who scampered after it as any kitten would.

Miss Pettifer inquired for Mr. Tucker in her sternest tone, and tried to catch the eye of the young lady upon the stairs, who held out a bare arm as though she wanted Miss Pettifer to admire its plumpness, while the kitten rolled itself over the ball, and the ball over itself, in high glee. The young person who had opened the door now took Miss Pettifer's card, that had been held out at her all this time like a pistol, and preceded her down a passage until she reached a

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door that had an opening in it like a letter-box. Through this aperture Lotty, for that was the name of Nellie's fellow-servant, dropped Miss Pettifer's card, and then knocked softly.

Miss Pettifer listened. 'Besides being so wicked'—she looked angrily at the sleeveless blouse of the girl, who listened too—'Tucker has gone mad,' thought Miss Pettifer.

The owner of the study must have picked up the card and read the name, for now a sheep's-bell tinkled.

This sound, that Miss Pettifer had heard now and again as she drove through the country in order to revenge herself upon some unsuspecting enemy, made her lose for the moment that self-command that she usually possessed so forcibly, and when Lotty opened the door and let her in, without announcing her, Miss Pettifer could only stare at Mr. Tucker's study-table, which was a square one.

Upon the table there were a sheep's-bell and a book. The book Miss Pettifer had heard of before. It was the very book, evidently bound by Mr. Tucker's own hands, and so well known in the district as containing those extremely wicked stories about women, every one said, that Mr. Tucker was known to carry in his pocket, and to read upon railway platforms, or indeed wherever he waited.

Mr. Tucker put the book under his coat. As he did so, something fluttered out of a page and



## INNOCENT BIRDS

fell upon the floor under the table. This marker looked to Miss Pettifer as it fell—though she couldn't see it under the table—like the picture of a woman.

Miss Pettifer felt sorry for the Church. Mr. Tucker bowed. He did not take her hand, because he did not wish to intrude again into her life, after the past refusal. He had been simple enough then to think that she didn't like him, and he felt the same now.

He bowed again and said meekly: 'I hope you will be happy at Madder, Miss Pettifer; it is a lovely village. There are fields to walk in, and ash trees that you can shelter under if it rains. And besides the cows, who are always so contentedly feeding, there is Mr. Solly, who grows pinks and columbines and is interested in what his Americans do. There is also Mr. Bugby, who grows a little melancholy, and takes too much brandy, I fear, and Farmer Barfoot, who talks to his foot, and Mr. Pim, who, though a little unbelieving as to how his son Fred came to be born, is really very proud of him.'

Miss Pettifer gasped. What with that sheep's-bell, the wicked story-book, a talked-to foot, and a disbelieving labourer who paid his debts, she feared that not the Church alone, but all that part of the country, needed a reformation. Miss Pettifer stood upright; she had tried to peep under the table, but, being unable to do so, she stood up stiffly.

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Without taking the very least notice of what Mr. Tucker had said, she spoke out with her usual boldness of manner.

‘Will you be so kind,’ she said, ‘to tell your ill-mannered servant girl to take a card at once to her master when a caller offers her one.’

A slight cloud of trouble crossed Mr. Tucker’s brow, but it soon cleared.

‘Perhaps they were playing,’ he said lightly, rubbing his bald head as if he meant to rub his last spoken word, like a salve, well into it.

‘Order them not to play,’ said Miss Pettifer.

Mr. Tucker’s little cloud came again, but he merely said : ‘I never see them, so how can I tell them anything like that.’

‘What?’ shouted Miss Pettifer, forgetting for the moment the proper manners of a lady.

‘I see their mothers sometimes in the village,’ answered the gentleman calmly.

‘Who gives orders, then?’ inquired Miss Pettifer.

‘Orders for what?’ Mr. Tucker asked in his turn.

‘To work,’ called out the lady.

Mr. Tucker smiled, and his hand touched the inner pocket that held the book.

‘Oh, all that goes on, of course,’ he said. ‘I only have to put my hand through the door and ring the bell Shepherd Squibb gave me, and then if I wait a little, there’s always something to eat and drink in the dining-room ; and once a month

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the baker's book drops through the door, and I put a cheque into it. If you mean by orders the ringing of my bell, I suppose I do give them. But even without ringing my bell—and I often forget it—the girls drop a piece of paper through the door, with "tea" or "breakfast" written upon it, and with "Please do come quickly, sir, or the potatoes will be cold," written below.

'Oh yes, all things go on,' said Mr. Tucker, who appeared to forget that Miss Pettifer was there, and looked out of the window as though for confirmation of the sentiment that he had uttered. 'There are those trees again bursting into leaf; no one rang a bell to them to say that summer was near, and the buds of Solly's pinks will soon be bursting again.'

Mr. Tucker sighed. He put his hand into his pocket and touched his book, as if he thought at that moment of what one of the wicked characters in his book had been saying. 'You old grumbler, I know what you've been saying; yes, yes, I know. These new leaves that are now being born will soon die; they will fall when the autumn comes, and rot in the ground. But they will dance first, they will dance in the air as they fall, and that will be the leaves' play-time.'

Mr. Thomas Tucker smiled joyfully. A group of children just released from school crowded into the garden and rushed to the swings. They were soon high in the air.

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Mr. Tucker turned to Miss Pettifer and held up a threatening hand ; the lady stepped back. 'Take care that you do not interrupt their playing,' he said. 'For whoever adds one tittle to the work of the world, or prevents one child from playing, commits the sin that can never be pardoned.'

Miss Pettifer walked to her car in a very ill humour. She passed the swings. One little girl, with her hair and clothes blown up, swung exactly above Miss Pettifer as she went by. She looked back. The child was high in the air again. Miss Pettifer more than half hoped that Mr. Tucker, who no doubt, as soon as her back was turned, had taken out his book and read something nasty, would have run out with the nasty thing quick in his mind to watch the girls play. But Mr. Thomas Tucker's blind was drawn down.

Miss Pettifer drove to Madder. Though Dodderdown is near to Madder, one has to take a rather wide circuit to reach there by road. Birds twittered in the hedges and hopped merrily from twig to twig, and were all happy together, because it was nesting time. All the larks in the fields sang to Miss Pettifer from the sky, and the first swallow flew by on its way to Farmer Barfoot's barn.

Miss Pettifer heard the birds sing. She believed they were all either lazy or wanton, either singing or amusing themselves together.

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She blew her horn loudly every moment, hoping to become a Mr. Bugby to the birds, and frighten them to work or die. Near to Boston Villa, Miss Pettifer saw a sight that shocked her more than the mere singing of the birds. A boy, with curly hair and a round rosy face, was holding a girl against the villa gate and kissing her. And what appeared to Miss Pettifer to be the worst of it was that the boy counted his kisses. 'It's your birthday, Polly,' Miss Pettifer heard Fred say.

She almost stopped the car going by.

'But I'm not a hundred,' said Polly; 'and you should have stopped doing it at seventeen.'

Fred began again. 'I won't make a mistake this time,' he said.

Miss Pettifer stopped her car in front of Mr. Billy's shop. A girl came out with a packet of margarine in her hand. The girl was pretty and gentle; she also looked hard-working and quiet.

Miss Pettifer was a lady of action; she left her car and followed the girl.

Miss Pettifer had come to Madder hungry for a country servant. She couldn't bite Mrs. Crocker so well in the mornings unless the bacon was nicely done; and a girl who carried margarine to her own home would, no doubt, fatten upon it in service.

Maud's heart throbbed when she agreed with Miss Pettifer to enter her service.

Maud resolved to work her best, because in everything that she meant to do at the rectory,

## MISS PETTIFER COMES TO MADDER

the grand promise of her life would be brought the nearer. She knew that there would have to be a man in it before her baby came ; and to work well for Miss Pettifer would be a sure road to attracting some man or other, and then, of course, there would soon be the tiny one.

No one had come yet, no man to suit her ; but that was because she rarely went out of the cottage dressed up to say she wanted one. Maud rarely went out, because she did not like to pass Mr. Bugby, who was always waiting for her. But it would be so easy to say now to every bachelor concerned that she was quite ready when she lived at the rectory. That would happen, of course, but now there was all the routine of hard housework before her. There would be the early-morning rising when Farmer Barfoot's cocks crew, as they always did—so the farmer used to say—louder than any others to wake up Betty, who preferred bed to movement. There would be Miss Pettifer's breakfast, and a fine to-do first in cleaning the kitchen grate, and all the other acts of fetching and arranging. So little every one of them, and yet so important ; and all meaning to Maud the necessary experience that she wanted before the coming of her little lord and saviour. She would dress in black in the afternoons, and with her work so well forward, as a good girl would have it, she might obtain permission to run home for an hour or two, to see what a mess her mother would be in.



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On Sundays she would show herself to the world, walking perhaps with Polly when Fred was with Farmer Barfoot's sheep, or else going with her mother across the downs to hear Mr. Tucker preach in his own village. In this way Maud saw her future.

Miss Pettifer left the Chick cottage in fine favour, as she supposed, with God, who had no doubt, with the advice of His Son, recommended Maud on earth to do the work that He hoped to do Himself in Heaven for the mistress of His choice, Miss Pettifer. All was now arranged as the lady hoped it would be, both here and hereafter. Maud Chick was to have but half the wages that another such a one as Lily Parsons would have wanted. Miss Pettifer, whose love of nature never went beyond the word 'beautiful'—a word that she applied to boot-blackening as well as to daisies—hardly gave a glance at the Madder field that she walked through to reach her car again.

Near to her car a man was standing. The man was looking at the car in a serious manner, as one would look who had a deep doubt in his mind.

'They running cars bain't easy to know about,' remarked Mr. Pim, touching his hat to the lady.

Miss Pettifer, having caught a servant in the fields of Madder, didn't mind speaking to this labourer. She did not know him as 'Pim.'

'Oh, they are very intricate,' she said. 'But I expect you understand a mowing machine?'

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Mr. Pim shook his head.

‘ A steam tractor, then ? ’

‘ No,’ said Pim.

‘ Thik intricate——’ Mr. Pim had liked the word. He moved his face closer to that of Miss Pettifer, who was now starting the car. ‘ Were en thik intricate, that, wi’ poor Annie a-helping, did get a boy who be named Fred ? ’

Mr. Pim looked about him ; there was no car there, and his question was still unanswered.

### *Chapter xiii*

## ‘GO TO BOSTON’

UPON this same day that Miss Pettifer came to Madder, Mr. Solly consulted, as was his wont, the Americans before he went out. He had a high opinion of their sagacity and wisdom, and their proneness to prophecy. Though the history of America didn't actually say so, Solly firmly believed that they, the whole race of Americans, knew all about God's Madder and his aunt's vision, and had, in a kind sort of way, taken the place of his good aunt when she died, and were always ready to give him wise advice as she used to do.

Since Mr. Bugby's arrival no sign or wonder had been vouchsafed to Madder ; although Solly had looked up at the hill every morning, and had often climbed to the top of it.

The Americans, too, had expressed no excitement or expectation of sad future happenings. They had merely spoken of cultivation—and Solly was always digging in his garden—and of the advantages of soil and climate. Seeing how peaceful and quiet all things were become, Mr. Solly had grown accustomed to watch the little children in Madder grow into big children, and the big children into young men and women.

But now, upon the day we are speaking of,

## ‘GO TO BOSTON’

America had let loose upon Solly a dire warning, for Solly's text for the day happened to be, ‘The men lay in rifle pits or shallow ditches, watching opportunity to kill.’

Mr. Solly walked in Madder deeply considering what he had read. He looked up at the hill, hoping to see a sign. Suddenly he found himself lying upon his back in a ditch. A car had darted past, and Solly, in order to save himself from being run over, had fallen into the ditch. Some one must have watched for this opportunity to kill him.

Mr. Solly climbed out of the ditch, shaken though unhurt. He wondered whether the Americans had really intended to warn him of this accident to himself. On the whole, he thought that they hadn't; though they might have wished to show him by this misadventure that their warnings must be taken very seriously.

In order to calm his nerves a little, Mr. Solly returned to Gift Cottage, and stood inside his own gate looking at Madder hill. He hadn't remained there for more than a few moments before he heard his Aunt Crocker speak to him. Her voice appeared to come from the deserted corner of the garden where nothing was planted. She told Solly to go to the Americans, who would show him to whom God's gift would be given.

Solly was by nature obedient; no voice ever came from the kind dead but he obeyed it.

He went indoors at once and opened the book.

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The first words he read were, 'Go to Boston.' Mr. Solly knew at once where the Americans meant him to go ; for he had heard sometimes whispers and other little sounds coming from the front room of the unfinished residence called Boston Villa, when he went that way.

He now set out at once to go to Boston. He crossed the stepping-stones, entered the gate, and stood beside the house wall. The Americans always spoke the truth—some one was there. Solly's thoughts and feelings were grown quiet and very still.

'I shall know now,' he whispered to himself, 'who is to receive the gift that God promised Aunt Crocker to give to Madder.'

Solly listened. He recognised Polly Wimple's voice.

'If you throw up your cap so high again, Fred, in those wide fields, you will lose it,' Solly heard the girl say.

'I threw it up into the sky to show the sheep how much I love 'ee, Poll.'

'One of these days an angel will catch an' keep en.'

Solly heard a scuffle and a kiss, and then other little sounds.

'You 've only six different sorts of clothes on, Polly.'

'Though thee did tickle I wi' 'ee's counting, thik sum bain't all right. Thee best go to school again, Fred.'

## ‘GO TO BOSTON’

‘I best begin again ; so do ’ee bide quiet and not riggle, Polly.’

‘Do ’ee leave I alone ; I be got so hot an’ funny.’

‘Seven,’ said Fred.

Mr. Solly peeped through the window. Fred Pim was holding Polly Wimple in his arms. They were alone. Solly went into the lanes again, and looked up at Madder hill. Although he had seen to whom the gift was to be given, he felt sad ; because, perhaps, he did not yet know what the gift was to be. He wished to go to a lonely place, where God had once been, and think about Him. If he climbed Madder hill, he might even find the bush burning again and God Himself there.

As Mr. Solly climbed Madder hill he wondered why he felt sad.

‘Perhaps,’ he thought, ‘when he saw those two so happy at Boston, he was reminded of pretty Nancy.’

He couldn’t help wishing that he had taken her to Boston instead of the heath.

‘No, Solly,’ he said sternly, looking hard at a large white stone. ‘No more of that, Solly. Of course every one knows that we all want to be loved and to be happy. They are happy now, and I hope the gift will not disappoint them. But it must be good, because it’s His gift, and I ought to thank the Americans for telling me His secret.’



## INNOCENT BIRDS

As Solly climbed higher a dank mist surrounded him, and he felt more than ever sorrowful.

He reached the top of the hill and found himself near to the bush that had once burned. The bush was not on fire. All was as usual, except that a black rabbit ran out of the bush, stood upon its hind legs, and looked at Solly.

Solly regarded mournfully the green summit of the hill. It was that day as it had been yesterday, and as it would be to-morrow. Solly listened. Distant sounds have a peculiar value for the ear of a solitary man upon a lonely hill. The trotting of a horse even can be ominous. Solly now heard a sound as distant and as fateful as that had been ; he heard the waves of the sea. Mrs. Crocker had never loved the sea ; she used to say it was unkind and cruel, and once when two tiny boys were drowned at Weyminster, she said sadly, ' Oh, what a wicked monster the sea is ! '

Mr. Solly heard the sea now. He felt extremely lonely ; he felt as though Madder hill had grown higher since he had gone to Boston. He felt it almost impossible that Gift Cottage could be so near in the valley, with the history of America resting upon the table, and all so tidy in the room just as he had left it.

Mr. Solly turned suddenly, and the hair of his head stood nearly upright. He stared at the thorn-bush, and was very much startled by hearing a voice behind it. ' Could God be still waiting about,' thought Solly, ' even though His

cloud was gone?’ The black rabbit had certainly run out of the bush as though something had frightened it. Was that something God? Mr. Solly knew that no being of clay could see God and live. He very much wished to see his pinks flower again; he had separated the old plants and set a whole new border with them. So long as God had stayed in the vision of his aunt, Solly had felt safe enough; for without God being somewhere no life could live, not even the sun that Bugby had once said He had frightened into shining.

Solly hadn’t been round the bush to see who was there. He had remained only upon the one side all the time that he had been upon the hill. Mr. Solly began moving slowly away, but backwards. He felt it proper to show respect to such a king who might be there, and as he walked he prayed that God would be kind to him, and remain hidden because of the pinks.

Solly stopped. Whoever it was behind the bush now spoke loudly as though grieved and astonished.

Mr. Solly was comforted; he knew he would see the pinks again. There was no mistaking that voice, nor the subject about which it was speaking, that was, Solly knew, one of the wicked stories in Mr. Thomas Tucker’s story-book.

Solly went behind the bush and found Mr. Tucker.

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‘ I hope you haven’t been frightened by anything ? ’ inquired Solly.

Mr. Tucker hastily shut his book and hid it away.

‘ I lost my way,’ replied Mr. Tucker, ‘ in the thick mist.’

‘ Reading ? ’ said Solly.

Mr. Tucker touched his pocket guiltily.

‘ You didn’t see the black rabbit ? ’ asked Solly.

‘ No,’ said Mr. Tucker, shaking his head and looking very seriously at his hat, that he had set upon his knee as though to crown that part of him a priest. ‘ No, I have come straight from Dodder-down, and I have only seen Susy. It is her birthday, and I carried a present of a brush and pan to her, for I don’t believe she has ever tried to clean the church for fifteen years and more.’

‘ Susy often opens the door and goes in,’ said Solly.

‘ But she never sweeps or dusts anything there.’

Though Mr. Tucker made this last remark in a very sad tone of voice, the next moment he was happy again.

‘ All these years I have hoped,’ he said, ‘ that as Susy never sweeps or dusts in there, she must go in to play some game or other ; the altar rails are often finger-marked, so perhaps she vaults them.’ Mr. Tucker rubbed his hands happily. His hat fell from his knee and began to roll down the hill. Solly caught it and returned it to its owner.

## ‘GO TO BOSTON’

‘I don’t like to bother Susy with questions,’ said Mr. Tucker, putting on his hat and rising from the ground, ‘so I sweep the church myself sometimes, just to keep Eva Billy from fault-finding.’

Mr. Tucker and Solly went down the hill together. At the bottom, near to the little brook, they parted company. Mr. Tucker walked towards Dodderdown, and Solly stood for a moment or two as though uncertain which way to take.

After all his excitement, and his wonderful fears of that afternoon, Solly wished at this moment for a little simple conversation about country affairs. He looked towards the meadow gate, hoping to see the same company that still sometimes came together there before the inn opened. He was not disappointed in his hopes ; a group of men stood by the gate.

The men appeared to be silent. They stood gravely, as though one of their number had raised a hard point in the discussion of the evening, that needed careful consideration, before any of the company had an answer to give.

When Solly reached them, Mr. Pim greeted him with a perplexed look, and no one spoke for a moment.

‘’Tis about thrones and kingdoms Pim be making inquiries,’ Job Wimple said at last.

Farmer Barfoot looked down at Betty in grave displeasure.

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'Pim do ask,' the farmer looked up at Solly, 'how much woon of they jewelled crowns do cost to buy; 'e do ask Betty, but she don't say nothing.'

All the company looked regretfully at the farmer's lame foot.

An idea came to Chick. "'Tis to be hoped,' he murmured, 'that Betty, who be always so knowing about they large pigs, do understand the price of a good fitting crown.'

'Pim,' said the farmer, evidently wishing to make a little more clear to Solly what was in the wind, 'Pim do want a crown for thik boy Fred.'

'That did come so wonderful,' added Mr. Pim.

'Poor Pim, 'e don't a-know,' continued Wimple, who now took up the tale, 'how thik boy Fred were a-got into daily life. 'Tis wi' 'e as 'twould be wi' I a-grave-digging.'

Mr. Wimple held his pipe in his hand as though it were a spade, and, looking at Chick, who sidled nearer to the gate-post and further from Job, proceeded as though to dig.

''Twould be no use,' said Wimple, seeing by Chick's hasty movement that his symbolic exposition was understood, 'to dig wi' thik.'

'Poor John Pim,' murmured Chick from behind the gate-post.

Farmer Barfoot nodded at Betty as if she had spoken.

'If so be Pim never done it,' said the farmer, 'then it must be same as Parson Tucker did a-tell

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of in 's last Sunday's sermon : 'twas God's woon misbehaving, an' Fred be 'Is an' not Pim's.'

'An' if Fred be got so grand,' remarked Wimple, looking at his pipe with displeasure, as if he still fancied that it was a rather poor spade, 'then 'tis Fred that should be crowned same as t' other of God's sons in Bible story.'

As Mr. Solly had now and again spoken of those Americans as though they knew something, so he, being their medium, was regarded as wise as they.

And when Mr. Chick came a little forward again, thinking that the pit-hole symbolism was over for the time being, he looked at Solly as if he, and indeed all of them, expected the owner of Gift Cottage to throw a new light upon the subject under discussion.

'God Almighty certainly promised my aunt, Mrs. Crocker, to give a gift to Madder, and His promises are true and eternal,' said Solly reverently.

Pim looked at Mr. Solly a little distrustfully. 'Will that gift be a proper woon for a good boy?' asked Pim, to whom God's conduct, as instanced in the behaviour attributed to Him in connection with Fred, didn't appear entirely righteous.

Mr. Chick now looked at Solly with awe ; he felt that any one whose aunt moved in such high circles should be very much respected.

The men were silent.

The white mist still covered Madder hill,



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gathering there like the smoke from a great cannon.

The mist slowly descended from the hill, moist and clammy, and covered the village. Farmer Barfoot looked at his foot with vexation. He had for the past five minutes been inquiring of Betty for a remedy for wire-worm that were eating his spring corn. And the only answer he had got out of Betty was that he must have the barley rolled.

He told Chick to do this the next morning.

*Chapter xiv*

FRED'S QUEEN

WHEN the summer sun shines Madder looks the kind of place that one would like to pat and to stroke.

Madder hill lies spread out then like a great sleepy pig, and when patted it would no doubt give out a friendly grunt. The meadows too would grow amorous and smile prettily if we stroked them, and feel both soft and springy to the touch, as though inviting a closer embrace.

Human life in Madder, as regards some folk, appears to stand still.

Mr. Billy never moved beyond sixty, whereas his nieces, who served in the shop, remained always at twenty. These young ladies, May and Eva, were the constant terror of Mr. Tucker, who feared that one day he might find one or other of them with a male companion, engrossed in a game that Mr. Tucker felt he should always keep well away from for fear of interrupting it.

Though time left Mr. Billy alone, it crept over Mr. Corbin like a snail upon a wall, and left its mark there. Mr. Corbin was grown old, and he knew it.

When he went to church he would always pause a moment, and nod and hold up a finger

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beside Mr. Soper's tombstone, as though to say that he was ready to listen if Soper was as ready to talk. But though he never heard one word from Mr. Soper, Corbin would walk on more briskly, as if Soper had confided to him again all the love matters between him and Minnie Cuddy, or else had whispered God's own secrets about the kingdom of heaven.

In church Corbin would always open his prayer book at the burial service, and read a little there, with his glasses on, and his head bent near to the book in order to show a true and contrite submission to the will of Heaven, and his willingness to go where Soper was gone—when his time came.

The Madder sun grew warmer ; each day beckoned out a new flower, a weed of the earth, to peep out—though sometimes a little tearfully—through the leaves of grass. But instead of growing more gay and merry in the summer time, the fields, and even the flowers—except the yellow ones—grow sad when the height of the season's beauty is reached.

This feeling of melancholy—and Solly even, though he felt it when he looked at his beans in flower, could never say why it was come to him—often grows up with beauty, blossoming when she blossoms, and gives out a deeper sadness than her loveliness can give joy. When we go into the courts of summer—courts of clear colour and fair flowers and sweet scents—a shadow will

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come by that is best greeted with our tears. This shadow is born with all beauty, and enters into us from the very loveliness that we are beholding, and makes us learn to welcome the rude grosser hours instead of the tantalising moments when beauty stays to sadden us.

Madder had now reached this fair mood, and succeeded so well in hiding the sorrowful shadow that we, and perhaps Mr. Solly, have alone noticed.

White clouds, like little lambs, remained still and quiet in the sky, and wondered, no doubt, what had happened to their noisy shepherd that so often drove them along.

Even Mr. Pim felt that the Madder noon was more than usually gracious that day, though a little wanton, as warm beauty sometimes is.

Mr. Pim was employed in mowing round a field of oats that had, by the advice of wise Betty, been planted early, and so by the height of summer were nearly ripe enough to reap.

Mr. Pim mowed modestly, as though he knew very well he was a master at the work, but didn't mean to tell Farmer Barfoot so.

If Mr. Pim felt himself so very clever, so did the heat fairies, who danced in the form of flies about him and tickled his neck, until he was fain to rest a little, and to wipe his scythe and his own forehead.

Even though Pim was wont to meet days as a wise man would who regarded anything outside

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his own affairs as mere nothingness, or else as mere impertinence, and generally greeting their manifestations of climatic changes by only a gesture of disapproval, or else a nod of approval; this particular summer's day, however, seemed to Mr. Pim to be inquisitive as well as impertinent. This day's inquisitiveness went so far as to notice that he wore his winter trousers, and to hint mischievously that had Annie been at home instead of Mrs. Chick, she would have given him his summer ones.

Mr. Pim laid down his scythe and rested under an ash tree that grew in the hedgerow. This ash tree appeared to have grown up in the night, like the prophet's gourd, on purpose to shelter Mr. Pim from the sun.

To Mr. Pim all past time was not so much behind him as around him; and the further it often was away by years, the nearer it was to him by memory. He had trimmed this very hedge, and cut down this very ash tree, some years before, and here it was grown again in a space of time that was to Mr. Pim but a day—for Pim lived not by hours in life, but by wonders in life.

This ash tree that had grown up so suddenly in order to shade him, brought Fred to his mind, who had grown up near as suddenly according to Mr. Pim's view of things. He considered, looking down at his scythe—he was sure it agreed with him—that he had reached a proper resting moment in which to sum up all old accounts that

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went to prove or disprove what he had done to help in the making of Fred.

A fly tickled his neck, and Mr. Pim thought of Minna, who had tickled him in the same manner as the fly, walking through those fields, and even more naughtily, for the poor fly only thought of his dinner, whereas Miss Minna . . .

He should have taken that chance, thought Pim, of asking Minna, who was then in so willing a mood to explain a little more fully what her grandfather had taught her about the wonders of life. He had been rather shamefaced then, because Minna would keep on asking him about the ways of creatures, and how they managed, until at length, feeling his own ignorance too great to bear, little John had run away crying.

He was a little braver the next time they went out. This time they climbed Madder hill to peep into the thorn-bush that all the neighbourhood knew to be haunted by the Devil.

On the way up the hill Minna had told him all about it, and said that it was as easy as making a plum-pudding. . . . But here was he, John Pim, getting on in life, and after all Minna's lessons, and Annie's soft sighs of contentment, he knew now no more than that Fred, who was grown a big boy, called him 'Daddy.' Pim rubbed his knee with his hand ; an ant had crawled up his leg and had bitten him. For some while now he had expected that Fred, who was the cause of all his doubts, would—whoever his male parent was



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—do something wonderful in life. As 'The Silent Woman' was open, Pim had begun again to sing his song there. Some one was mentioned in that song who would come home loaded with riches from Spain. But who?

The less he had to do, and the more the other one, with the begetting of Fred, the more likely it was that Fred would become something kingly. If one miracle had happened—and to Mr. Pim, Fred was that miracle—other wonderful things must perforce come, and all to do, of course, with Fred.

A lark was singing in the sky, and Mr. Pim, considering himself as good a songster, sang his song too. He sang to remind himself that he was Mr. Pim, and also to remind Fred, if in hearing, that he was the ship that should come in loaded.

Every simple mind has monstrous hopes, and Mr. Pim's hope now was that Fred would one day go to Spain and return again to Madder, loaded and as grand as a king.

And so he sang:

'Oh, you shall drink wine  
So sweetly in the season, then you shall be mine.  
You shall have no pain; I will you maintain.  
My ship she's a-loaded, just come in from Spain.'

One wonder always led to another in Mr. Pim's mind. He now looked up at the ash tree,

## FRED'S QUEEN

and wiped his forehead with his large red handkerchief. He was now sure that if Fred was the ship, Annie was the lady mentioned in the song.

'Annie were buried,' said Mr. Pim aloud, 'very fine. But though she be buried, me Annie do live still in some great large house ; for thik finery never were meant to bide under dirt. No woon need tell I, for I do know ; for thik grand driver did take she far an' on, when Wimple were gone home to Minna.'

Pim looked up through the ash tree leaves to the blue sky where the lark had been singing. He looked carefully for the hat—and nodded.

' 'Tis just one of they notions being burned,' he said ; ' 'twasn't nothing to Annie. Same chap that did drive carriage do make sun shine, for Parson Tucker bain't no lie-maker in's pulpit.'

Mr. Pim took out his watch, that was nearly as monstrous in its size as his hopes were for Fred, and read carefully the signs upon the watch's face that informed him that it was time to go home. Leaving the ash tree's shade, he moved through the fields with the slow gait that suited his nature and his labours. Fred Pim, too, had left the sheep safely folded at about the same moment that his supposed father had left his ash tree. Fred walked gaily, and whistled to the larks, who replied by singing. He threw his cap into the air three times, because he was so glad to love and to be alive. Fred had learned to be a very

## INNOCENT BIRDS

good shepherd, and was always hearing that Farmer Barfoot's Betty thought a great deal of him, because he counted the sheep so carefully.

'When 'e 'ave finished counting they sheep, 'e do start on they hurdle stakes, an' 'twill be they daisy flowers next, Betty do say,' the farmer had told Solly one evening beside the meadow gate.

The dog Timmy, a long-haired creature with a bass bark but a kindly nature, loved Fred more than his rightful master, the farmer; for Betty had once kicked him, and he had never forgotten it. Timmy would follow Fred wherever he went, and if Fred met Polly Wimple, the dog would behave with a discretion worthy of Thomas Tucker about the gamesters, and curl round in a ball like a long-furred cushion and fall asleep.

Polly might never have seen Fred at all this evening when he returned from the fold—for he walked by the side of a very high hedge, while she loitered in the lane—unless she noticed something that went up into the air, that she knew very well to be Fred's cap.

'Fred!' she called, when he reached the gate.  
'Fred!'

Timmy bounded over first, but as soon as he saw it was Polly who had called, he went to the hedge side, curled up, and was in a moment fast asleep. In order to get to the Chick cottage Mr. Pim came down the same lane. He had neither the nature of Mr. Thomas Tucker nor yet of the dog Timmy. Coming round a corner

## FRED'S QUEEN

where a bush of bramble decorated with honeysuckle grew out into the lane, Mr. Pim came upon Fred, who had laid aside his crook, and had taken up Polly instead as if he had a sudden impulse to count her dimples. This pretty lesson, and an easy one, for there were only two dimples to count, appeared to have to be worked out by means of kisses.

Mr. Pim could only open his mouth and stare. He wondered that Fred, being so high placed, should show such mortal manners, under the honeysuckle tree, even in counting.

It was Polly who, turning a little that she might hold Fred the nearer to her, now beheld Mr. Pim watching with the astonishment natural to a man who always kept such a serious doubt, as his was, in his head.

'Who be you?' inquired Mr. Pim, addressing either of the two, who were so near together.

Fred, who always left the more simple facts of life to Polly to explain, threw his cap in the direction that he should be going, and followed, leaving his father alone with Polly, for Timmy, of course, had gone after Fred.

Mr. Pim stepped back, while Polly gave her clothes a shake a little frowningly, as though they hadn't been behaving as they should. Then he came near to her and touched her. He felt her hair in order to discover if she was mortal or not.

Being reassured by this touch that she was indeed no near relation of that high-hatted driver

## INNOCENT BIRDS

of Annie's carriage, Mr. Pim looked at her more closely.

'A maiden.' Mr. Pim sighed out the word, and slowly nodded his head. 'You bain't Polly Wimple, be 'ee?' asked Mr. Pim.

Polly laughed.

'My name isn't really Polly,' she said; 'that's only what I'm called. Up in church I were named "Mary."'

Mr. Pim took off his hat. He began to scratch his head in the same careful manner that he often hoed a field; he began on one side and finished at the other. The word 'Mary' had made him thoughtful. He always quickened his thoughts by scratching the outside of his head.

He now recalled what he wished to remember. He looked at a bryony leaf in the hedge, as though the day he wanted to remember had hidden behind the leaf.

The day had been hot and dusty, and mid-summer too. He was leading Farmer Barfoot's bull to market. The bull had stopped suddenly by the side of the road, had lowered its head, and sniffed intelligently at the cover of a picture paper that had been thrown there by a passing car. 'What be reading?' Pim had inquired, as though he thought the farmer's bull was a well-educated English squire. The bull still sniffed at the paper. Pim looked down too; he wished to know what it was that interested the bull so much. He read the name of the lady under the

## FRED'S QUEEN

picture that the bull was admiring—'Queen Mary.'

Mr. Pim looked at Polly Wimple. Polly sighed. She wanted Fred so badly. Mr. Pim knelt beside her. He raised her hand to his lips, as the gallant knight had done in the picture. 'You be Queen Mary,' he said.



*Chapter xv*

MR. BUGBY SEES A  
BLACK BIRD

POLLY Wimple did more than admire Fred, she loved him ardently. She didn't think as Mother Maud used to, only about the baby. She didn't think about a baby at all. She wanted Fred in a way that simply meant to her having all of him, without any addition to that all.

Polly knew that she had belonged to Fred from the very day of Annie Pim's funeral, and whenever she saw Fred, or when he touched her as a child, she felt the same feelings that she got that day when she was kissed by the sun. She thought longingly about him as the sun had taught her to think. She didn't want anything else in the world but only Fred. Tiny hands, nor yet a sweet-smelling baby's neck, were no more thought of by Polly than chairs or tables.

No other boy or man existed to Polly, in her Madder world, except Fred Pim. A kiss from any other would have broken the charm of her life. She kept herself entirely for Fred, and he was never for one moment out of her thoughts.

They had already begun to talk of a tiny cottage near to the Madder green, that belonged

## MR. BUGBY SEES A BLACK BIRD

to Farmer Barfoot, when something queer happened to Maud Chick that prevented Maud from working any more at the Madder rectory.

The ways of life go a little crookedly at Madder sometimes, as they do elsewhere in the world. Perhaps the season of the year was responsible, and certainly one might as well blame the autumn as blame Mr. Bugby for what happened.

For so long a time had Mr. Bugby remained modest and thoughtful with the brandy bottle, where the black glove had been: as modest nearly as Susy with her broom, though the brandy bottle was certainly the more used. Mr. Bugby's mystery, like Susy's sweeping out the church, had lapsed a little. For whether it was Mr. Pim's song, or Farmer Barfoot's conversations with his Betty, or whether, out of kindness, he merely waited for 'The Silent Woman' to deal with Mrs. Bugby as it had dealt with those others, or whatever else it might have been, Mr. Bugby had so far lived very harmlessly in Madder. But it is nice for us to remember here that a good hangman never forgets his trade. Though years may pass by without his call coming, he will be sure to be as ready with the noose as we—according to John Baxter—deserve, and are ready to be hanged. It was a dull and misty day. So misty was it, that Mr. Solly couldn't even see Madder hill from the window of Gift Cottage.

Mr. Bugby sat, as his wont was these days, by

## INNOCENT BIRDS

the side of the bar table, and near to the brandy bottle. He was looking meditatively at his wife, who was washing out the mugs.

Mr. Bugby stroked his chin, and regarded Mrs. Bugby with the same kind of troubled frown that a scientific gentleman might give way to, when making an important experiment that wasn't acting as it ought. Mr. Bugby saw his wife in the same way, as if she were a large beetle upon the wall of a room that was filled with sulphur fumes, only to see how long the beetle liked them, and how soon it would fall upon its back and die. That 'The Silent Woman,' with its history of wife-killing, hadn't completed its duties by killing her, whom Mr. Bugby had brought to Maddar for that very reason, just as the man of science had carried the poor beetle to be suffocated, and saw it still creep, was indeed a sufficient reason to give our poor landlord a troubled expression of countenance when he looked at his victim.

But though not dead yet, Mrs. Bugby looked withered ; the house had done that much for her, or else the years. She appeared a little frightened too, as was natural, with Mr. Bugby as her husband.

Whenever Mrs. Bugby did anything inside or outside 'The Silent Woman,' she was always conscious that some one or other was looking at her. If it wasn't Mr. Bugby indoors, it was Mrs. Chick out of doors, who would always jump as though startled when she saw Mrs. Bugby by

## MR. BUGBY SEES A BLACK BIRD

the well or fetching sticks for the fire, as if she thought it was Mrs. Bugby's ghost that she saw.

'I do bide here and grow religious,' remarked Mr. Bugby, whose sober reflections now gave way to utterance as directed to the row of wiped mugs.

'But you do go to Weyminster sometimes,' said Mrs. Bugby, as though to cast a hopeful doubt upon this sorrowful state of her husband's mind.

'I be religious,' said Mr. Bugby, taking no notice of her kindness, 'an' good for nothing.'

'You've been to Lily and they tothers at Weyminster, and done what you've been minded.'

'In a holy way,' said Mr. Bugby, 'I did a-do it.'

'But you be always watching of Maud Chick when she do run home across meadow ground.'

'Religiously,' said Mr. Bugby, 'until this very day.'

Mr. Bugby raised his glass to his lips. He put the glass down empty and smiled. He was evidently trying to overcome—being more noble-minded than holy Willie, who was a villain as well as a hypocrite—this sad tendency that he had found in himself towards religion. He drank a little more brandy, and then said to his wife, as if he felt how far off she was from doing the right thing, 'But thee bain't stiffened out nor rotted under dirt.'

Mrs. Bugby retired from the bar crying. Something that moved in the air of that dull

## INNOCENT BIRDS

autumn day must at that moment have addressed itself to Mr. Bugby, for he left his place by the table and, moving heavily to the window, looked out.

While Mr. Bugby regarded the prospect that was around the inn, a large bird flew by.

Mr. Bugby watched the bird. Although he wasn't in the least interested in either the habits or manners of birds, this one appeared to be bringing a message to him, that wasn't religious. The bird circled the inn, and every time it went by the window it twisted its long black neck a little, and peeped in at Mr. Bugby.

' 'Tisn't likely,' said Mr. Bugby to himself, when the bird was flown seawards, 'that there be much religion in they innocent birds.'

Mr. Bugby took up his cap that hung upon a nail behind the bar parlour door.

'If thee bain't a-drowning, best to mind inn,' he called out to Mrs. Bugby, who was leaning with her elbows upon one of the barrels of beer and still crying, 'for I be going to Dodderdown.'

*Chapter xvi*

MAUD CHICK BEHAVES  
QUEERLY

MISS PETTIFER had never had a better servant than Maud Chick. Not even poor frightened Annie had done the housework more carefully. Miss Pettifer blessed the good fortune that led her to revenge herself against Madder by going to live there.

A proper order of social manners was always observed at the rectory. Maud Chick fed upon margarine, while Miss Pettifer ate of those good things that her station in life provided for her, of which good things Maud was sometimes allowed a picking when Miss Pettifer had done her part with them.

Upon the same dreary afternoon when the elm trees were weeping and their tears were falling into the mud, and when Mr. Bugby had seen the strange bird and walked out for a little, Miss Pettifer decided to send her quarter's rent to Mr. Thomas Tucker. She sent Maud with it. Miss Pettifer always liked to take her tea at half-past four, as most ladies do.

Miss Pettifer had allowed ample time, and had generously given to Maud a quarter of an hour more as a birthday present, for this day was

## INNOCENT BIRDS

Maud's birthday, to make use of as she chose during her walk to Dodderdown and back again to Madder rectory.

As soon as Maud had started, Miss Pettifer, being in a mood for it, walked out a little too, and passed Mr. Bugby, who evidently had business in the Dodderdown direction as well as Maud Chick. Mr. Bugby lifted his hat as he went by the lady, and this politeness drew from Miss Pettifer a nod and a smile.

When Miss Pettifer reached the rectory again—she had walked a little farther than she had intended to do when she set out—she looked at the marble clock, that was ornamented with corn-flowers, that is to say painted ones, and saw that the time, that went always in that household according to plan, had reached half-past four. With even her birthday present, Maud ought to have been home and bringing in the tea-cloth by four-fifteen. Miss Pettifer poked the fire and rang the bell sharply. She frowned at the round table whereon the white afternoon tea-cloth, with its pretty worked flowers, should have been resting. A pair of half-open scissors and a reel of cotton were upon the table instead of her tea.

Miss Pettifer disliked these scissors ever afterwards. She now took them up and moved the cotton, but still the round table looked as barren as ever.

Miss Pettifer rang the bell again. She waited impatiently, and her anger against Maud made



## MAUD CHICK BEHAVES QUEERLY

the minutes fly as though they wanted to hurt Maud too.

Nearly an hour went by before Miss Pettifer, whose hearing was more than usually awake this afternoon, heard the back door of the rectory open and shut. Maud Chick must have come in. Miss Pettifer was ready enough to see that something was wrong with Maud, who came after a few moments to prepare the table.

Maud had usually come in so straightforwardly, as a girl would whose one idea in life was to earn a baby by her own industry.

‘But why,’ thought Miss Pettifer, ‘should Chick run into the room in little darts and dashes, like a scared mouse when a cat’s after it?’

Maud nearly let the teapot fall upon the table instead of putting it down with her usual care. And why had she brought the teapot only; did Maud expect Miss Pettifer to drink from the spout?

Miss Pettifer pulled the bell, very gently this time but very meaningly.

‘When a girl comes in like that,’ thought Miss Pettifer, ‘she must have been doing wicked things.’

It wasn’t Miss Pettifer’s habit to work herself up into a rage, as a more ordinary mistress would do, but instead, she would sit in an icy manner and pretend to give no heed to what the culprit was doing, almost inviting her to drop another spoon, or all the spoons, if it pleased her to do so.

## INNOCENT BIRDS

But what was Maud doing now? Miss Pettifer was looking intently at the clock, and even smiled as though she were asking the minutes, not how they run, but why they had allowed themselves to pass her tea-time without fetching Maud in earlier. The minutes, or rather the mirror behind the clock—for Miss Pettifer had one eye upon that too—told her that Maud was bringing the tea things in one by one, like a rook carrying twigs to its nest. And when she put the bread-knife down, she started back as if she thought the bread-knife wished to jump after her.

When Maud tried to light the spirit-lamp the spill went out. She tried again, but with no better success, for her hands trembled so that the spill wouldn't keep alight.

Miss Pettifer moved, with one motion, to the fire, her strong, well-nurtured, and proved body, showing off its sharp vicious points in the movement. She lit the lamp, and with one glance she saw what Maud had forgotten, and ordered her, in the tired voice of an injured lady, 'to bring in the butter.' Instead of bringing in the butter, Maud carried into the drawing-room of the Madder rectory the kitchen margarine! Miss Pettifer said nothing.

She ate her tea, when Maud was gone out of the room, in short quick bites, crunching some little stones that happened to be in the cake as though she enjoyed them. Now and again,

## MAUD CHICK BEHAVES QUEERLY

after taking a sip from her cup, she would stamp her foot, in a way that showed how she meditated business of a sharp, quick nature.

After Miss Pettifer had taken her usual afternoon nourishment, though with no butter this time—she more than once looked at the margarine—the lady went to the sofa and took up her knitting-needles. She began to knit quickly, clashing vindictively the steel needles against each other as though they were sharp swords. Her father, then, had led his careful life, and all for this ! that his daughter, who had always seen to it that he had all the food he wanted, should be now served with common margarine for her tea.

Here was a Madder indeed turned against her in a vile manner ; and after she had helped the people so much by taking a girl who, she was sure now, was always out with the men, into her service. She must now get rid of her, of course, and then hunt in the Madder lanes after another. She feared God didn't make life very easy for His chosen.

The needles clicked sharply, and Miss Pettifer gazed at the lilac blossom that bloomed prettily on the chair covers. The chair covers were certainly saying as she was—that Maud must go.

Miss Pettifer laid down her knitting. She remembered Polly Wimple.

Miss Pettifer was a lady who, though she kept herself very much apart from the people, liked to

## INNOCENT BIRDS

hear the village news. She had heard about Mr. Solly, and she didn't like the idea of him. She had heard, too, about Fred Pim from Mrs. Billy, who had said, rather harmlessly for a lady with two nieces whom she wished to get married—'that if Fred went on wi' more of his counting of a maid's things, 'twere best 'e had she to church.' Miss Pettifer had not answered Mrs. Billy's remark, and Mrs. Billy feared she had offended the lady by mentioning Fred's sums. And so, in the hope of turning the lady's wrath away, Mrs. Billy pointed out to Miss Pettifer an account in the local weekly paper of a 'wanton assault,' as it was called, by a lay Baptist preacher.

Mr. Hall was the man in trouble, the lodger in Lily Parsons' Weyminster home. Miss Pettifer looked down the case eagerly, anticipating what she hoped would have happened to Lily. For from what Lily had told her during her time of service—and Miss Pettifer always remembered anything of this nature—the lodger, when put to it, might act as Mr. Bugby.

The preacher had excused himself by saying, with conviction, that he thought Lily was asleep.

'I thought she was asleep, and that no one cared about her,' said Mr. Hall, bowing to Mr. Pollen, the magistrate. 'And I only did what I thought she would like me to do.'

'Why didn't you struggle or bite him?' asked Mr. Pollen, who had once been bitten himself

## MAUD CHICK BEHAVES QUEERLY

by an animal of the same species whom he had tried to kiss.

‘I was too tired,’ sobbed Lily.

Mr. Pollen coughed.

The lodger was committed for trial. Miss Pettifer borrowed the paper. She wanted to read, she said, ‘about the Prince of Wales’ visit to Stonebridge Castle.’

It was Lily Parsons—and so Miss Pettifer had a certain right to be angry with her—who had called out to Miss Pettifer in the street ‘that she hoped she would plaster her false hair’—and Miss Pettifer’s wasn’t false—‘with stinking margarine.’

The fear of this happening—for Miss Pettifer wisely doubted her own ability to cook—made her the more anxious, now that she was resolved that Maud must go, to secure Polly Wimple.

And so Miss Pettifer went to bed thoughtfully, considering, as she looked into the glass smiling to herself, how she could get Fred Pim away from Madder, and so prevent a wedding that would, if it did nothing worse, spoil a good country servant.

The sun looked kindly in at Miss Pettifer when the new morning came, and when Maud let go the pink bedroom blinds that run up of themselves.

Maud wasn’t Maud. Miss Pettifer saw this easily enough as soon as the light came in. Maud hadn’t even dressed herself properly as a servant

## INNOCENT BIRDS

should who carries a cup of tea into a lady's bedroom. She hadn't even done up her hair or fastened her print frock.

Maud was now putting the cup near to Miss Pettifer's elbow, that stuck out sharply above the bedclothes. Miss Pettifer looked at Maud. She could hardly believe how the girl could have come in so nakedly ; she didn't seem to have anything on at all under that thin frock of hers.

Miss Pettifer stared at Maud.

'You're mad, Chick,' gasped Miss Pettifer. 'And you had better pack your box and go home. Only, dress yourself first, please,' she added. For Miss Pettifer still remembered the pleasure that Lily used to tell her she had got from being seen by the men a little untidied. She didn't wish, now that Maud was leaving her, that she should get even one grain of happiness.

Maud looked at Miss Pettifer with wide-open, staring eyes, and then went to the window—drawn there by the happy sunshine, no doubt—and gazed out of it.

After a moment or two of watching, Maud gave a sharp scream of terror, and ran back to Miss Pettifer, crouching down in an agony of fear beside the bed.

*Chapter xvii*

THE AMERICANS SEE A CROSS  
OF DOOM IN THE SKY

MR. SOLLY came down from Madder hill in a more hopeful mood than when he climbed up.

He had gone up Madder hill to look at the sky, because one of his Americans had seen a huge cross in the heavens, which told him of coming and inevitable doom. After reading about the cross, Mr. Solly had at once climbed the hill in order to see if the cross was still there.

‘He had seen enough already,’ he thought, ‘without that cross coming.’

When Solly reached the summit he looked anxiously upwards, but he only saw the blue heavens, that were clearer than usual. He sighed, and permitted his eyes to view the country around instead of the sky. He saw all the clean cool lands shining in the clear light of day. Everywhere there was colour and shadow—deep colour and deep shade. There were large wide spaces of green, and the further downs and heath were rich dark purple. A little cloud, like a skipping goat, covered the sun for a moment, and Solly watched the clear black body of its shadow running over the earth.

Clean beauty in form and line affected Solly in



## INNOCENT BIRDS

a different way than his pinks and columbines. They were but little women, and naughty ones at that, at least the pinks were ; but these other wonders of the earth and heaven moved nearer to the living God. Mr. Solly was not ashamed to pray to Him from whom all life comes. He knelt down upon the grass of that place and prayed that God might show him one day what the gift was that He intended to give to Polly Wimple and to Fred Pim.

Solly wasn't more inquisitive than any other simple gentleman resident in the west of England, but he knew that his Aunt Crocker would like him to see what the gift was, as well as to know to whom it was to be given. When Mr. Solly had finished his prayer, and was come down from the hill, he crossed the little brook, noticing that there were still forget-me-nots in flower, and went along the lane near to the church gates.

Susy was walking up the church path with a new broom, that had been presented to her only a little while before by Mr. Thomas Tucker. Susy was walking in her usual flat-footed and bulky manner, dragging the broom behind her as if she were a product of the older world and possessed a long lizard's tail.

Solly watched Susy to see what happened to her, for Eva Billy still complained to everybody that her Sunday frock got more soiled by the pews, than by any green grassy bank that she chanced to lie down upon when she walked

## A CROSS OF DOOM IN THE SKY

out with Sam Peach of Dodderdown. When Susy was quite near the church door she let go the broom and went into God's house, leaving her tail—more lizard's than lamb's—behind her.

'Perhaps Susy only means to set a mouse-trap to-day,' Solly thought.

A little way on down the lane, and below the rectory, Solly stopped suddenly, and, without knowing exactly why, he looked up at Madder hill. There wasn't a cloud upon the hill, but only a large dismal bird that flew around the lonely thorn-bush in circles. As the bird wheeled, it paused in the air ; and with its wide wings and its neck stretched out, it might easily have been the very sign in the sky that the American had taken to be a cross.

Mr. Solly hoped that this winged cross of doom would fly away from Madder and never come back again.

Feeling a little tired, Solly sat down upon a root of one of the largest of the Madder elms, and waited a little nervously to see what would happen next. . . .

In the servant's bedroom at Madder rectory, Maud Chick was trying to pack her box. For some reason or other nothing would fit in. The hat that she had saved up so many shillings to buy, having fancied it as just the very thing for her to be churched in, while Mother Chick, sitting in the front pew, would hold the baby with all the

## INNOCENT BIRDS

care that Maud's many warnings had given her ; she tried to fit the hat in beside her Sunday frock, thinking that these two at least should be friends. Maud took up the hat. She looked at it in an odd frightened way, and tried to fold it. As the hat wasn't her holiday blouse, it resisted this new idea of Maud's. Was the hat become a boot ? No, she supposed it couldn't be, and yet she was trying to tuck the end in as it were the higher part of a boot. Maud now began to take all her clothes, that she had already placed neatly in the box, out again. She had forgotten her workbox, that should have been placed at the very bottom. But before she reached the bottom, she had begun putting everything back again in a great hurry, as though she had seen something queer amongst her things that frightened her.

Although Maud was properly dressed now, her hair was fallen down again, the pins having been put in too loosely by her trembling hands. She tried to get her hair into order again, though not very successfully.

Maud dared not go to look in the glass now ; she had looked once that morning, and had seen the face of a man looking at her in a horrid manner.

Maud shut her box. It was, she supposed, her own hand that had locked it. She held up her hand and looked at it a little nearer. Yes, it was a girl's hand undoubtedly, and it was hers.

## A CROSS OF DOOM IN THE SKY

Maud sat upon her bed for a moment and looked at her box as though she wondered why it was there. Why had she dragged it out from its usual corner? Oh, nothing had happened to the box. It was only Maud Chick's!

Maud's little longing had always been so simple and straightforward. She had learnt all the best Madder tradition about the babies when she was little more than a baby herself, because she always felt that she was born to be a mother. She had kept herself so carefully, too, feeling sure that the father would come, and she wasn't at all particular as to who he would be; for all that part would just mean 'the baby' to her.

There was no Madder custom regarding an infant's or a growing child's welfare that Maud didn't know about. Maud was all ready for her baby. Every little bit of housekeeping knowledge was a twig for her nest. And what a proper nest it was that Maud meant to provide, so artfully made, so cautiously prepared, so intact.

But why was the box there? and some one must have packed it, too.

A bell rang sharply below stairs. That bell meant that Maud must go out somewhere—home, perhaps?

The bird that Mr. Solly had been watching had flown seawards, and Solly was upon the point of going home to Gift Cottage when he

## INNOCENT BIRDS

saw Maud Chick coming, in a hesitating way, down the lane.

Maud was one of the Madder young women that Mr. Solly would sometimes give a summer flower to, or else an autumn one. He would lean over the white gate as though he were only there by chance, and say, though not looking at Maud but up at Madder hill : ' I hope you won't think me rude, Maud, if I offer you these ; Mr. Tucker always says that my flowers smell like Lebanon.'

And here was Maud coming, and Mr. Solly hadn't any flowers to hold out to her. He wished he had stooped down and gathered some of the forget-me-nots that he had seen in the brook ; he knew he would have enjoyed doing that, going down upon the narrow bridge and leaning over the water to reach the flowers.

Mr. Solly watched Maud coming.

She walked very slowly, hurried for a few steps, and then stopped as though the hedge had frightened her. She came along in this manner, moving and stopping, and sometimes she put her hands over her eyes as though to shut out a sight that she didn't wish to see.

As she came nearer, Mr. Solly grew anxious, and wondered what ever could be the matter with Maud. He wished more than ever now that he had picked those forget-me-nots.

Maud didn't notice Solly until she came quite near to him. But when she did, she gave such a

## A CROSS OF DOOM IN THE SKY

scream of terror, that he nearly fell into the nettles that surrounded the root he had chosen to rest upon. And Maud, hiding her eyes, fled past him.

Solly watched her ; her dreadful scream had filled him with shame and terror.

‘ I oughtn’t to have sat so quiet,’ Solly said aloud, as though trying to explain Maud’s fear. ‘ I ought to have called out, “ Never mind me, Maud, I ’m only Mr. Solly ; I ’m Mrs. Crocker’s nephew—I ’m nothing.” ’

Solly walked slowly home to Gift Cottage. His hands trembled when he opened the white gate. In his parlour the *History of America* was still open upon the table. Solly looked at the book mournfully. He felt sure that both he and the Americans had seen a portent of coming doom in the sky.

*Chapter xviii*

‘ ’TIS RELIGION,’ SAID  
MR. BUGBY

SOMETIMES we wonder, when those who live in fear and torment, those who are tainted with a sad and lasting distemper of the mind, are not removed from their sorrows and dreads, by the hand that is supposed to rule the world, more quickly than the usual slow-moving cruelty of life allows.

But wonder though we may, the bitter things that are written against some trembling ones have to be lived through to the end, be that end near or far, or ever the great day of liberation comes. And even this liberation, that some look forward to so kindly, may for aught we know be but a change of scene : the mere rounding of a point in the sea of time, where the memory of the old woes will beget again new torments, to be remembered again, and new-begotten again, through all eternity. But though we may wonder sometimes about it all, Mr. Solly was much too wise to do so, because his aunt was Mrs. Crocker, and because he as well as his aunt believed that God has a good gift to give.

Even though the cross of doom had shown itself in the Madder sky, Solly believed that in



‘ ’TIS RELIGION,’ SAID MR. BUGBY

the end God would pour out the whole wonder of His gift, not only upon Madder, but upon all the world. ‘ But first,’ thought Solly, who preferred to contemplate local matters rather than universal, and who also liked concrete reality, ‘ but first, I should like to know what the gift will be ? ’

While Mr. Solly was thinking about God’s gift, and considering that it must be a good gift, or else He would never have promised to give it with Mrs. Crocker so near, Maud Chick had shut herself up in the tiny cottage bedroom that used to be her own before she went to Madder rectory.

She was not much happier there than she had been anywhere else since she had taken that walk to Dodderdown. Mrs. Chick had heard of Maud’s screams ; Eva Billy, who had always been a little jealous of Maud, was one of the first to report about them.

Mrs. Chick liked to be amused, and a scream from Maud, if she could get her to give one, would certainly be an entertainment worth the getting. And so, when Maud was got to her room, Maud’s mother knelt down and peeped under the bed, as much as to hint ‘ that a man might have been there as well as in the fields.’

Maud did scream ; she also crouched in a corner, and tried to hide her body with her hair, as though she fancied that she was naked.

## INNOCENT BIRDS

Mrs. Chick left her, and busied herself in tidying up in preparation for the doctor, for whom Fred had been sent.

The doctor being come and gone again, Mrs. Chick opened the stairway door and called out to Maud : ‘ There baint nothing—only they wold shadows in thee’s room.’

Screams more terror-stricken than ever now came from Maud, though even these became quiet after a while, for Maud covered her head with the bedclothes so that ‘ they wold shadows ’ that her mother had so kindly noted couldn’t get to her.

With those screams in her ears, and all the excitement caused by them, Mrs. Chick felt that she herself would like to be looked at for a few moments by a man. She showed so well as a large woman with her blood merry, and hoped that she hadn’t grown out of being a sufficient reason for a man’s desires to come out of his eyes and cover her.

Mrs. Chick went out into her garden and stood near to the stile that led to the inn. Noticing her there, and being drawn perhaps by the electrical waves that went out from her, Mr. Bugby, who was walking in his garden, came near to the stile too.

Being satisfied by her own feelings that Mr. Bugby’s looks—and she hoped his hidden thoughts too—were where she wanted them to be, Mrs. Chick opened upon the

‘ ’TIS RELIGION,’ SAID MR. BUGBY

subject of Maud, a subject that all Madder was talking of.

‘ ’Tis they men she be afeard on,’ she said. ‘ An’ though ’er dad bain’t much of a man, she do scream at ’e too.’

Mr. Bugby lowered his eyes a little.

‘ She do fancy that they bedroom shadows be after her.’

Mr. Bugby’s look closed with Mrs. Chick’s desires ; her blood danced like a girl’s.

‘ Maud’s notions be queer,’ said Mrs. Chick, who wished to explain the matter in detail to Mr. Bugby, now that his eyes had let her go again. ‘ She do fancy that she did meet a funny man in they wide fields. An’ she do scream out that thik funny man were a-doing something to she.’

Mrs. Chick’s blood was quieted ; Mr. Bugby hardly looked at her now.

‘ Doctor do say,’ remarked Mrs. Chick, ‘ that she’s nerves be broke. “ ’Tain’t nothing, only they nerve breakings,” ’e told I. An’ Fred be now gone down to doctor’s for something to stop she a-screaming at they shadows.’

Mr. Bugby leaned restfully against the stile and looked up at one of two little bedroom windows of the Chick cottage. He smiled, and hoped that Maud might chance to look out, and so notice how concerned her neighbour was about her illness. Seeing no one at the window, nor yet hearing the scream that he had hoped might

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be the result of his gazing, Mr. Bugby, shaking his head slowly, said in a mournful tone, as though the sad circumstances allowed of no other: "'Tis religion. 'Tis religion that did take hold of maiden, an' thik man that did find she in field mid 'ave been Thomas Tucker.'

Mrs. Chick at once took this bait of scandal in true country fashion. She spread herself out nearer to Mr. Bugby and smiled.

Mr. Bugby deepened the plot.

' 'Twere to visit Farmer Andrews that I walked across to Dodderdown,' said Mr. Bugby, 'for to pay 'e for a bit of straw for stable. I did go along by vicarage mead hedge, and so to farm. 'Twas behind hedge that I heard some one say, "It really isn't quite proper for me to go on reading about these 'sweet flowers.' They remind me far too much of Solly's pinks and columbines——"'

' 'Twere Mr. Tucker,' said Mrs. Chick, 'that thee did hear talking over hedge; an' 'e were telling about thik book of wickedness that 'e do read. Them shouldn't be printed, them sinful books.'

'As I walked home,' said Mr. Bugby, 'I did see Parson Tucker hurry across dead-man's field, after something that did shine white an' flutter in blowing wind.'

' 'Twas Maud's white scarf 'ee did see,' said Mrs. Chick excitedly.

‘’TIS RELIGION,’ SAID MR. BUGBY

Mr. Bugby looked away from Mrs. Chick.

Polly Wimple was hurrying along the footpath to the Chick cottage.

Mr. Bugby looked at Polly with that indrawing look that a snake is said to use when it wishes to devour a little bird.

‘Fred Pim ’ave called she out to see Maud,’ remarked Mrs. Chick.

Polly now began to run ; she wished to get quickly to Maud. Her girl’s body, now rendered more than usually warm and tremulous by Maud’s troubles, moved like a young doe’s whose gentle sister had been hurt in the forest. She ran willingly, because Fred had asked her.

‘’Tis religion,’ said Mr. Bugby, looking at Polly’s young strong legs, ‘that do hurt they maidens.’

Mrs. Chick went to her door to greet Polly, to show her upstairs, and to see what would happen then.

Mr. Bugby walked slowly to the well in his garden.

His wife was leaning over the well drawing water. To throw her in at that moment would have been easy to so strong a man as Mr. Bugby. But he merely looked at her in a sad manner, as though he felt more than ever at that moment the weight of the world’s wickedness.

‘When I do see,’ remarked Mr. Bugby mournfully, ‘a maid that do run and show she self, I be put in remembrance of a man that do some-

## INNOCENT BIRDS

times frighten a maiden. A running maid, that be a maid, do ask for Mr. Bugby.'

Mrs. Bugby crouched beside the well and shivered.

'They skipping legs, that were lifted so pretty and showed more than maiden did know of, did ask a question. They did ask what a man be like.'

Mr. Bugby looked down at his wife's head. 'Grey,' he said, 'be the colour of an old one, an old one who be neither in grave nor rotted. But I were talking,' said Mr. Bugby, 'of a maiden—of a maiden who do walk out wi' Fred Pim.'

Mrs. Bugby took her bucket and hurried with it weeping to the inn. The meagre lines of her body, cut and beaten into by every-day toil, leaned jaggedly towards the pail.

'Don't 'ee, now,' said Mr. Bugby soothingly, 'go an' strain thee's pretty self wi' bucket-carrying, for when night-time do come there won't be nothing to warm I wi'.'

Mr. Bugby thinking—and no doubt wisely—that even at night-time there wasn't likely to be much warmth in that jaded outline of a woman, decided that at the moment, and in order to give rein to thoughts—that were none of the cleanest—a half-pint of brandy would aid his happiness in life.

Mr. Bugby followed his wife indoors.

*Chapter xix*

DERBY IN SPAIN

MISS PETTIFER had had a fine run of lady-like house-keeping with Maud Chick as her servant. No house in England, of the upper middle sort, to match the church-like doorway of Madder rectory and the red blinds, could, Miss Pettifer felt sure, have been better managed than hers.

Of course, by heinously bringing in the kitchen margarine for her mistress' tea, Maud had thrown all her earlier hard work and careful management to the four winds of heaven ; and the only excuse she could give was, that she had been frightened by something she had seen in Dead Man's Meadow.

The result, madness and terror, proved to Miss Pettifer that God's justice—though it was at the moment a considerable inconvenience to herself—had been righteously expended. For to be drove mad by fright, Miss Pettifer decided, was exactly how every careless servant girl should be treated if they wilfully allowed the clock to run on past tea-time while they stayed out with the men.

A rumour had reached Madder rectory, coming by way of the shop, and clinging to a packet of stamped envelopes that Miss Pettifer bought there, that Mr. Tucker had been taken, or rather



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witnessed, toying wantonly with Maud in the meadow, and that Farmer Andrews had heard the girl screaming for help.

‘Mr. Tucker do read thik book,’ Mrs. Billy had said, while Miss Pettifer carefully counted the envelopes to see that all the eleven were there, ‘and that do set ’im off for to read they maids.’

Carrying the envelopes home in her gloved hand, with all the stickiness of scandal about them, Miss Pettifer thought—and not for the first time either—that one of her most praiseworthy wishes would always be, and one of her chief hopes too, to get that story-book of Mr. Tucker’s into her own hands, so that she might forward it to the bishop, with an explanatory letter enclosed about his servants and those swings.

With that book and letter posted, Miss Pettifer felt sure, her own presence in Madder would be more than justified by exposing a priest whose wicked reading had led him to do all kinds of things—Miss Pettifer gasped—with this Chick. And also, no doubt, told him how to tell all those dreadful lies about his never seeing his own waiting maids.

‘He sees all of them,’ said Miss Pettifer aloud, as she locked the envelopes with a safe click in her writing-table drawer, ‘in their night-clothes.’

No lady knew better than Miss Pettifer did the advantages of being a mistress. She had never been so foolish as to think that a lady who

## DERBY IN SPAIN

dressed the hours, as she dressed herself, in measured costumes, could fit these settled movements of the day without the aid of a Parsons or a Chick. No lady could do proper justice to the lord of those chairs—Mr. Hall wept when the auctioneer explained that they were but chairs, and not coffins—unless she kept up a correspondence with her friends, and so occupy her mornings in nice contemplation of her own handwriting upon half a score of letters.

The coffined one—and Mr. Hall would have been right about this last seat—would have expected no less than that his daughter, who had allowed him Oxford marmalade on Sundays, should receive in exchange for all her letter-writing, two or three hesitating ones ; and these, not all from country gentry, by the morning and afternoon post. These, and such-like signs and wonders, with the Mayor of Weyminster's automobile crunching her gravel as if it liked it, were enough and more to prove to the village, even without the baker's remarks, that real money had come to her with the help of those chairs.

How to get a country girl to work was one of those questions that Miss Pettifer had found a complete answer for. She had merely to find out what the girl loved most in life, and to play upon her feelings there, in order to win the game.

There had been Maud Chick's love of a baby, that Maud had so often talked about, that gave such a chance to Miss Pettifer.

## INNOCENT BIRDS

‘ You will never be able to dress and feed it, Chick, if you cannot finish the housework here by two o’clock, and be ready to answer the callers with your clothes changed.’

And now here was Polly Wimple in Miss Pettifer’s service, and all Madder knew well enough who and what it was that Polly liked most in the world. Polly was more skittish than Maud had ever been, but all her skittishness went one way—to Fred Pim. Polly’s hair had gold in it, and a sweetness as of Solly’s pinks, and Polly’s white arms were like fine summer Sundays.

For a week Miss Pettifer watched Polly working. When Sunday came, and Miss Pettifer bit at the bacon and Mr. Tucker, she decided that she couldn’t allow this Polly Wimple to marry young Shepherd Pim. If that were to happen, all her hopes of a Madder servant would fade again. She might even be left with the chance of her own hair being buttered, as that wicked girl Parsons had hoped it would be. But Parsons had always been a liar and a deceiver. She had told a naked lie to poor demented Mr. Hall, the preacher, by staying so still—‘ And, of course, that was what she wanted,’ thought Miss Pettifer. ‘ But this Fred,’ she decided, ‘ must be got away from Wimple.’

That Sunday Miss Pettifer thought out a plan. This plan, or rather plot, of Miss Pettifer’s was consummated by the simple means of a message

## DERBY IN SPAIN

sent by Polly to Mr. Pim and his son Fred. And so, when the first real evening's frost of winter crisped the Madder grass, and when the last yellow leaves upon the Madder elms were deciding whether it is wiser to fall off oneself or to be blown down by the sea winds, Mr. Pim and his son Fred were out in the lane, dressed in their best, and moving their newly blackened boots with the full intent and purpose of visiting Miss Pettifer.

Mr. Pim, who had a simple belief in himself, as well as his one doubt, considered that as he thought about himself a good deal, other people, and especially those high ones both in earth and heaven, would think about him too. He believed Miss Pettifer to be one of the highest, because she kept a servant, drove about the country in a car, and did nothing that could be called by the vulgar name of work.

When he first received the message he said, 'You be Mary, bain't 'ee?'

Polly said she was.

'A servant.' Mr. Pim said the latter word scornfully. 'Thik queen's name don't match wi' t' other.'

'You're to come,' said Polly, 'as soon as you've cleaned yourselves.'

While Pim did so, Mrs. Chick discovering his clothes like a mariner looking for new islands while he shaved his chin by the little glass downstairs, he decided that Miss Pettifer must have sent

## INNOCENT BIRDS

for him because she had found the right answer to his question as to how Fred had come to be born.

Mr. Pim was by no means the kind of man to hurry a lady to explain so subtle a matter as his doubt, though he hoped she intended doing so. He merely took one of her chairs, that he moved a little for a reason only known to himself, and regarded the other chairs as if he wondered whether they had Mr. Pims sitting upon them too. Fred, out of politeness to the lady, had chosen a music stool that had been placed in a corner near to the door.

Miss Pettifer didn't smile ; the affair of getting Fred sent out of Madder was too serious for that ; she nodded at Mr. Pim, and said, without a word about the weather, ' Have you any idea, Pim, where the splendidly prosperous city of Derby is ? '

Whether this Derby, that Miss Pettifer seemed so glad to mention, had anything to do with his doubt or no, Mr. Pim wasn't sure ; but if it wasn't that, he was sure it must have been about his song. He supposed so, and replied with no hesitation, ' 'Tis in Spain, Miss Pettifer.' After this geographical exposure, Mr. Pim looked curiously at Miss Pettifer's clothes, that consisted of a black afternoon frock, neat stockings as far as Mr. Pim could discern, and evening shoes, size sixes. Having never seen Miss Pettifer in such garments before, because when the lady went out she wore tweeds or checks,

## DERBY IN SPAIN

Mr. Pim couldn't help thinking that he might have made a mistake about the song, and that the lady, by making use of the word Derby, had really intended to explain away his doubt by means of a personal experiment. Mr. Pim, who had only looked first at the other chairs and then at Miss Pettifer, now looked at the sofa. . . .

Minna, in that field where the cows used to feed so restfully, and where the hedgerow grasses would shed white seeds if touched in August, had once said a funny word that had certainly no more meaning for Johnnie than Derby had. Minna had been more than usually naughty that day ; she had teased little Pim about the ducks, and then she called out ' Cockroaches ! ' and ran to a bank of flowers.

' Was Derby,' wondered Mr. Pim, ' merely another sound gesture with the same interpretation ? ' though Minna did say afterwards that little boys weren't like grandfathers.

But Miss Pettifer, who evidently noted that Pim's eyes were wandering, brought him back to his first reasoning with a jerk by saying :

' If Fred could only get to Derby, he would make a fortune.'

' In from Spain.' Mr. Pim knew his song, and he knew what the words meant now.

The meadow gate, that had taken the place of the bar parlour while the inn had been closed, had for some while now, except for a chance meeting of friends, remained silently alone. And



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Pim's song had come into its own again, regaining its old kingdom of pewter pots and kindly barrels.

In order to see Derby correctly as a place in rich Spain, Mr. Pim bethought him of the richest sight that his life's history had ever shown to him.

'The ticket to Derby,' said Miss Pettifer, speaking very slowly, 'costs one pound fourteen shillings and fivepence ; this money I will lend to Fred.'

Mr. Pim looked up at a picture of the late Mr. Pettifer, painted a few years before his death. The lawyer was sitting in one of his chairs. But curiously enough, Mr. Pim didn't see the lawyer as a man or even the chair as a coffin, as Mr. Hall would have done. But he saw Derby in Spain. He saw Derby as a city set upon a hill and shining as that wonderful carriage had shone that brought Annie home to Madder.

'He will come home as a gentleman,' said Miss Pettifer.

Mr. Pim's pride began to rise very high, higher indeed than when he received the bill for Annie's carriage, and near as high as when he had seen the carriage itself. He felt that this was no moment for him to express any doubt as to his fatherhood, however it had happened, and he couldn't help feeling that he had certainly tried to do—though Annie shouldn't have kept laughing so—all that Minna had hinted at during



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those walks to school. And now he must needs believe.

He was Pim, and even if God Himself or that high-hatted one had a foot in it, they might have forgotten now how they managed ; and if that was so, why should not he, Pim, take all the glory, if Derby city were to give it to him, by means of Fred ?

‘ Fred be me boy,’ remarked Mr. Pim, staring the lawyer out of himself and into Derby ; ‘ so Annie did say.’

‘ He ’s your son,’ said Miss Pettifer.

‘ He ’s me son,’ said Pim. ‘ Though ’e mid be t’ other’s too,’ he added.

All this time Fred Pim had sat still and said nothing. After finding the stool for a seat, he found the floor to rest his eyes upon.

While he heard his future spoken of, he had found, too, an object of interest upon the carpet for his eyes to look at. This was a dead fly. The fly had fallen from the ceiling. Fred wished to pick up the fly ; he knew that Polly wouldn’t like to think that this dead fly had chosen to die upon Miss Pettifer’s carpet. But what was this dead fly listening to ? Something that Fred should hear.

‘ Your son will be able to marry Polly when he comes home rich from Derby.’

‘ But I love Polly,’ said Fred, ‘ and I want her now.’

Miss Pettifer coughed. ‘ You mustn’t speak like that,’ she said.

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But the dead fly had loosened Fred's tongue.

'Farmer Barfoot do praise my work,' he said.

'Farmer do talk to Betty about I and about they sheep. "'Tis a good working boy Fred be," farmer did say. "When 'e bain't throwing up 'is cap, 'e be counting.'"

'All the more reason for your going to Derby,' said Miss Pettifer, 'if you 're so clever.'

'And there is Maud,' said Fred; 'she do fancy I be a small child again.'

Miss Pettifer sniffed.

Fred tried once more.

'I love Polly,' he said.

Mr. Pim saw Derby filled with ladies dressed in black frocks and pearl necklaces.

'A servant bain't nothing,' he remarked scornfully.

'You wish your son to go?' Miss Pettifer said, holding the bell in her hand.

'Yes,' said Mr. Pim, 'thik be me wish.'

## *Chapter xx*

### MR. TUCKER IS ASTONISHED

MR. THOMAS TUCKER liked frosty mornings. A frosty morning made him wish to play like a kitten ; and he would first admire the frost flowers upon his window and then open it wide so that he could lean out comfortably to look at the white grass as though the frost had painted it, as a surprise to please every one, and him most of all. December having come and a frosty morning, Mr. Tucker leaned out so far from his window, in order to breathe the cool freshness, that he nearly overbalanced. Regarding this nearness to a fall as a joke, that entertained him almost as much as the putting on of his surplice always did, Mr. Tucker chuckled, dipped his body into a cold bath, and dried himself with a rough towel.

Without his clothes Mr. Tucker looked like the figure of a fat little god in an Indian temple, but as he never saw himself in any other version except as merely 'Old Tucker,' he never cared what he looked like.

After tingling his sheep's-bell merrily, as if all the bell wethers in the world had shaken their necks in Dodderdown vicarage, Mr. Tucker ate his breakfast happily while his maid-servants laughed and chatted in the kitchen.

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In his study, beside a fierce burning fire of logs, Mr. Thomas Tucker bethought him of his story-book, wishing to see what the characters therein—very naughty ones, according to reports circulated in the district—were saying about themselves.

Mr. Tucker felt for his book as usual in the pocket of his coat, but found nothing. Had the book been stolen? Mr. Tucker didn't think so. He was by no means aware of the interest that all the neighbourhood took in his fancy reading; he didn't even know that the Archdeacon had once mentioned the book with abhorrence at a meeting of pious clergymen.

'No, no one,' he thought, 'would wish to steal this book; with its home-made cover it looked utterly unattractive. And as to the reading inside, well!! . . .'

Mr. Tucker now remembered that he had the day before carried the book to Madder, and had stopped to read a little under a straw stack in one of the Madder lanes. No doubt he had forgotten to put the book into his pocket, and it had spent the night under the straw like a homeless tramp.

'He wouldn't mind lying there like an outcast,' said Mr. Tucker, evidently referring to one of the characters in the book.

Mr. Tucker put his hand through the hole in the door and rang the sheep's-bell, so that any one in hearing might know that he was going out.

## MR. TUCKER IS ASTONISHED

He then stepped out of the low study window on to the frosty grass.

Mr. Tucker walked along the high downs to Madder. The turf was firm and springy, and the stones that covered the downs shone white in the winter sun. Mr. Tucker's feet were more than usually nimble ; he carried his hat in his hand, and his gait, though not pretty, threw at least no gloomy shadow beside him.

Going down into Madder, he reached the stack where he hoped to find the book that he loved to read, and was glad enough when he saw it safe upon the straw.

Mr. Tucker was on the point of opening the book, at a page where a piece of straw had been put in as a marker, in order to see what happened to a man whose tragic history he was following in one of the stories—when he heard steps in the lane.

The steps stopped in the lane near to the stack behind which Mr. Tucker was ; and the two human beings who were denoted by them as being there began to say good-bye to one another. Mr. Tucker had no wish to hear what was said ; but neither did he wish to disclose himself so as to disturb them, in case they might wish to play together for the last time, ' as happy young people should like to do,' he hoped, ' when they are leaving one another.'

' Oh, you 'll soon come home again, Fred, and you 'll bring back a heap of money, so that

## INNOCENT BIRDS

we may live as well as Farmer Barfoot and his silly Betty.'

Sometimes upon a winter's day one hardly notices when the sun ceases to shine. The face of day is slowly changed, like a man's face when life is withdrawn.

'Miss Pettifer says there's heaps of money in Derby.'

The fair crisp look of the winter's day was grown dim now.

'One, two, three, four, five; no, no, no more, no more, darling; I can't go on counting any more. And now they are all coming so fast, I couldn't get any farther than twenty. No, don't, Polly, don't cry, darling.'

When he heard the first words spoken, Mr. Tucker pressed both hands to his ears, and buried his head in the straw stack. Coming out again after some moments were gone by, Mr. Tucker listened. There were no voices now to be heard. Mr. Tucker put his hand into his pocket and touched his book.

He stood yet and listened, as though he expected some sound to come to him.

It came, the deep continuous sound of distant waves falling.

From where Mr. Tucker was standing, he could see the white road that crossed the downs and led to the world beyond. This white road was the same down which poor Annie Pim had been brought home. The figure of a traveller

## MR. TUCKER IS ASTONISHED

who carried a bundle now appeared upon the hill-top, showing clearly against the grey sky. Fred Pim was going to Derby. . . . Mr. Tucker's story-book was so varied in its matter that he was certainly used to sorrowful as well as happy things happening there ; so that he wasn't altogether surprised—for he took his ideas of life from his book—that unlooked-for events, and not always kind ones, should happen in Madder.

That Fred Pim should be leaving the village, and leaving sun-kissed Polly behind him, seemed to Mr. Tucker's mind to show the movement of the same dire hand of destiny, that cut so deeply into the lives and characters in his story-book.     •     •

Mr. Tucker sighed when he thought of Polly. Some one's experiences in his book seemed to be particularly suited to Fred's departure, and he hoped that nothing would prevent Fred and Polly from meeting again in happiness.

The Madder elms were now all weeping in the quick thaw, and had Fred stayed he would have had as much difficulty in counting these drops from the trees as Polly's tears.

Mr. Tucker left the stack, walked into the lane again, and under the dripping trees.

Going beside Mrs. Billy's shop—he thought it unlikely that any child would want to play now the frost was gone—he heard May Billy say in a tone that certainly wasn't a playful one, 'They pews do get more dirty each Sunday, an' God



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alone do know what Silly Susy do go to church week-days for. Maybe 'tis to take folks' prayer-book markers.'

Mr. Tucker stopped in the road. Madder church was in front of him, a little to the right hand. He regarded the porch as though to inquire what it was that Susy went under it for.

May Billy came out into the road to see what Mr. Tucker was staring at so intently. She looked scornfully at the church, and brushed with quick womanly strokes her serge skirt. 'Perhaps,' she thought, 'some of dirty Susy's dust is still upon it.'

'Susy be gone to church now,' May said, pointing with her hand at the ponderous dark mass that was Susy, who waddled rather than walked up the church pathway.

Having been rammed into the church himself, Mr. Tucker now felt that he should at least just peep in to see what Susy did there.

'Perhaps she collects all the books of devotion,' he thought, 'and builds houses with them on the altar table.' He hoped she did, knowing well how glad God would be to see Susy so playful and happy.

On his way to the church, Mr. Tucker went by Gift Cottage. He there came upon Mr. Solly leaning dejectedly over the white gate and looking, as though his hope was too wonderful to be true, at Madder hill.

## MR. TUCKER IS ASTONISHED

Polly had passed by Gift Cottage on her way home to the rectory after she said farewell to Fred. Polly was crying.

‘Aunt Crocker could never tell a lie, could she?’ Solly inquired of Mr. Tucker.

‘Not with God listening,’ replied Mr. Tucker.

‘Then He will give His great gift to Fred and Polly; He never tells lies.’

‘Not with Mrs. Crocker listening,’ replied Mr. Tucker.

Solly sighed softly and looked up at Madder hill.

‘But what of the Americans?’ asked Mr. Tucker.

Solly was thoughtful. ‘The Americans are very near the end of their history,’ he said slowly, ‘and I fear that soon there will be nothing else for them to do but to live in the glory of their past. They are beginning to manufacture iron and steel, including machinery.’

Mr. Thomas Tucker looked very grave.

‘I hope,’ remarked Mr. Solly, who appeared to be a little happier now, ‘that the Americans will not mind my burying them.’

‘You don’t mean to do that, do you?’ asked Mr. Tucker, putting his hat firmly upon his head, and then taking it off again.

Mr. Solly turned and looked at the corner of his garden that had never been planted.

‘I would rather bury America in that corner,’ he said, ‘than that its noble history should be

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used as a mere wrap for sugar candy and patent corn cures.' . . .

Mr. Thomas Tucker invited Solly to go with him to Madder church, in order to see what Susy did there. Mr. Tucker walked in short steps, Solly in longer ones. They passed under a large Madder elm tree. Solly looked up through the branches.

'His gift will be wonderful and lasting,' he said, as if the branches were a ladder that led his thoughts to heaven.

Mr. Tucker appeared for the moment to be sad.

'If the gift is lasting,' he said, 'then it cannot be a child's game.'

The rising wind had compelled Mr. Tucker, who felt the cold now the thaw had come, to put on his hat. When they were come near to the church door, Mr. Solly remained a little way behind, while Mr. Tucker went to peep in. Soon Mr. Tucker appeared again, with his finger to his lips, and beckoned. Solly silently entered the porch.

Kneeling before the altar railings, a great mass of faded black clothes was spread out. Behind this kneeling heap, that was Susy, there was a new brush and pan dropped in the aisle.

Mr. Tucker went out of Madder church and leaned, in order to prevent himself from falling, against Mr. Soper's tombstone.

'Susy goes to church to pray,' he whispered excitedly to Solly.

## *Chapter xxi*

### DAISIES

‘**W**E love a daisy,’ Mrs. Crocker once said when she was walking with Solly in the meadows near Weyminster, ‘because the daisy always grows in that same valley of humiliation where the shepherd boy sings his song.’

‘And where there are glow-worms,’ said Solly.

‘But if, as Christian did in that same valley we see an ugly thing, nephew, we mustn’t call it Miss Pettifer.’

Solly took his aunt’s hand and kissed it.

‘We are all ugly things sometimes, dear Solly, but let us think of our earthly bed as a safe hiding-place from all our ugliness—blessed be His name.’

Mrs. Crocker sat down upon the grass and looked at a daisy.

‘To an old woman, this mortal life—all that is left of it—is closing in upon every side ; and we are forced to bow down nearer and ever nearer to the earth. But look at this daisy, Solly ; it knows its times and seasons.’

Mrs. Crocker looked up at a hedge where two children in white frocks were picking May blossom.

‘Who would wish to be called Mrs. Crocker,

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or even Deborah Crocker, for ever?' she said, smiling. 'And poor Crocker always felt his name such a burden.'

Solly looked up to try and find a lark that was singing in the sky.

'You know'—Mrs. Crocker sighed, but not unhappily—'that good dear Crocker collected poor rates, and when one day he called for mine, and sat gratefully upon the chair I had given him, instead of giving me the receipt at once, he said shakily, "I must get this load off, or find some one to share it."

"What load?" I asked.

"I mean my ugly name," he said; "but if you would be kind enough to share it with me, we might soften it a little, so that all the rate receipts wouldn't stare so."

'I had no answer ready at the moment.

"Do you forgive my having such a name?" he said, more timidly than ever.

"I will sign my own receipt with it," I replied.'

'Aunt,' said Solly—the lark had stopped singing now—'you like forgiveness; you even forgive Miss Pettifer.'

'But I don't like her,' said Mrs. Crocker. . . .

Going out from church one Sunday afternoon in spring time, the next spring that came to Madder after Fred Pim had left the village, Mr. Solly, seeing that the daisies were about, be-thought him of his aunt and her words about a daisy. He had passed by Miss Pettifer, who

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was waiting in the porch ; and thinking more of Mrs. Crocker than of the Americans, Mr. Solly walked to Gift Cottage.

With the service over, Mr. Tucker had tried all he could to take it seriously—that gentleman was now amusing himself by peering into the vestry looking-glass on purpose to see how very funny an old bald-headed man can make himself look with a surplice on. He was winking at himself for about the twelfth time, when Wimple, the Madder clerk and sexton, crept in on tiptoe, and whispered impressively into his master's ear, ' that " she " was waiting.'

' Who is waiting ? ' asked Mr. Tucker.

' Miss Pettifer,' replied Job.

' And 'tis 'ee,' Job put his heels down gently, ' that she do want.'

For such a long time now Miss Pettifer had disregarded the existence of Mr. Tucker, that he couldn't prevent himself showing by his downcast looks his surprise to Mr. Wimple.

Seeing this surprise as so depicted, Mr. Wimple whispered again: ' 'Tis to send Maud Chick to mad-house that she be come ; for Maud do often go an' cry up at vicarage, an' do stop Polly working—so Miss Pettifer do say.'

Instead of amusing himself any more with the glass, Mr. Tucker now looked longingly at the vestry window.

' They small bees do fly in,' said Wimple, in a

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helpful tone, noticing where his master's eyes went.

'I believe I could fly out,' said Mr. Tucker.

'Thee bain't going to try, be 'ee?' remarked Wimple, whose tone of voice expressed the horror he felt at his master's suggestion. 'Best to bide in cupboard till she be gone, for thee bain't a small bee.'

Mr. Tucker lifted the vestry table near to the window and climbed upon it. Forgetting, in the excitement of his escape, to take off his surplice, he, with his legs going first, squeezed through the window; the last view of him being a broad grin, to which grin Mr. Wimple touched his forehead with his forefinger, as became a good and faithful church servant. With this vision still in his head of his departing rector, Mr. Wimple silently finished his own duties in the vestry, and departed too, putting on his hat in the church so as to be able to take it off to Miss Pettifer in the porch.

'I wish to speak to Mr. Tucker,' said Miss Pettifer. 'How much longer am I to wait for him?'

'E be a-reading of 'is book,' Wimple replied innocently, 'an' 'ave a-got to page forty-nine, chapter six.'

Even though Polly had tried in every possible way to procrastinate, in order to keep the cabbage from being burnt, when Miss Pettifer did at last arrive at the table, in no very ami-



## DAISIES

able frame of mind, there was no hiding the fact, after so much warming up, that the dinner was spoilt.

When she had done with it, Miss Pettifer rang the bell in two sharp angry pulls.

‘I am not at home,’ she said, when Polly came, ‘to any callers ; but you must be.’ Polly usually went out on Sundays. ‘I intend to write a letter to the bishop about the wicked book that Mr. Tucker reads all day long in the vestry.’

If a gentleman, who happens to escape from a lady who has something nasty to say to him, is wearing a surplice as he scrambles through the hedges of good Farmer Barfoot, it is most likely that he will be greeted with laughter by any one who sees him.

Mr. Tucker liked laughter. But the day being Sunday, and having been rammed into the decorum as well as into the doctrine of the church, he modestly chose the deserted upland meadows instead of the lower lanes in his walk home to Dodderdown. Descending into a narrow green valley, somewhere between the two villages, that was dotted with daisies that reminded Mr. Tucker of shining hailstones, he could not avoid giving a skip or two of pleasure : a mere modest caper, during which he held up his surplice to prevent himself from treading upon it. But, and Mr. Tucker stopped himself in a meditated skip over a gorse bush, he was not

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alone. In the bottom of the valley, sitting amongst the shining daisies, there was some one crying. Mr. Tucker put his hand to his pocket to see if his story-book was there. Maud's tears reminded him of some one in his story who once wept. Mr. Tucker's happy excitement now changed its manners. Mr. Tucker looked at Maud and wept too. . . .

Mr. Tucker liked to see children playing but not crying, so after crying a little himself—as the character that he loved best in his book had done—he went a little nearer to Maud, sat down upon the grass, and looked at the daisies. Mr. Tucker knew more about the troubles of a human mind than most of us do ; his book was full of those troubles as well as, according to the Miss Pettifers of the world, of obscenities.

Mr. Tucker wisely thought that in order to quiet Maud's tears he must needs begin by stilling his own.

He looked at the daisies. He had once wanted—he remembered this now—to make a daisy-chain. And here were the daisies.

Mr. Tucker put his hat upon the grass ; he picked two daisies and knotted the stalks together. He held these up and looked at them, wondering how best he could tie another one on ; for those two alone wouldn't go very far round a lady's hair. Mr. Tucker picked another, and tried to bind that one with a piece of grass to the other two. This third daisy fell off at once.

## DAISIES

But Maud Chick had been watching him ; her tears were quieted now, and she stood beside Mr. Tucker and saw his trouble. Maud smiled.

Mr. Tucker began to pick the daisies. He gave them to Maud.

Maud, in a manner that is only told to children by the fairies, soon made a long chain of the daisies.

Mr. Tucker placed the chain round her hair. Maud's hair was white.

Soon after her walk to Dodderdown, the afternoon when Miss Pettifer's clock went faster than Maud, Maud's hair had begun to grow grey. It was now white. With the daisy-chain around her hair, Maud allowed herself to be led by the hand.

Mr. Tucker led her through the village of Dodderdown towards the vicarage garden. . . . Whether or no it was the effect of the story-book that Mr. Tucker carried in his pocket, or whether innocent madness is itself something that frightens a certain kind of man out of its path, we cannot say : but two men, Mr. Bugby and James Andrews, who were standing near the farmyard gate, and talking of the price of straw — for Mr. Bugby wanted some — now moved, when they saw Mr. Tucker and Maud Chick coming, into the stable.

'They clergy bain't religious,' Mr. Bugby remarked, peeping through the stable window.

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Farmer Andrews laughed. . . .

In the vicarage garden, tender and shining new-born leaves gave Maud and her daisy-chain a welcome. And Mr. Tucker, who had his own idea about her madness, hoped that his garden pond might, on such a warm day, give him a chance to cure her, because little boys bathed in it. He led her there, hoping for the best.

A few Dodderdown boys were happy splashing one another in the pond : merry because their clothes were off, and happy because they were chasing the frogs.

‘ See how they splash,’ said Mr. Tucker, and left Maud to watch them, while he went to ring his bell, so that he might advise one of his maid-servants to lead Maud home to Madder again.

Maud watched the boys ; she wasn’t frightened, but she looked at them curiously. Soon she caught a frog for them and threw it into the pond. The boys splashed and laughed, and Maud Chick laughed too. Her fear had left her, as Mr. Tucker—who had learnt a little about madness from his book—hoped it would ; but alas, only to change the tenor of her madness.

Maud smiled kindly at the boys. The eldest of them came near to her, laughing. He gave her a little water-beetle to look at.

Maud looked curiously at the beetle. She threw it away.

## DAISIES

'No, no,' she said, 'I don't want a beetle, but please give me a baby.'

The boys looked at Maud. They stopped splashing the water, and went away behind the trees to where their clothes were left.

*Chapter xxii*

MRS. BUGBY'S FRIEND

ONE afternoon Mrs. Bugby came out to her garden well in order to draw some water. She lifted the well cover, and before she let go the bucket she looked down.

At the bottom of the well, at a depth that seemed very far from the upper world, there appeared a dim small circle of black water. This inky circle had been for a long while now Mrs. Bugby's companion in life—her friend.

Whenever Mrs. Bugby thought of her friend she stopped crying. Often she saw her friend at midnight, when brandy-sodden Mr. Bugby would be both lamenting the fact that he was born to frighten the maidens, and explaining how he did it. Mrs. Bugby's friend had one disadvantage attached to the excellence of his serene disposition. He lived so deep that in order to reach his kind blackness, and embrace him, as she longed to do, for ever, there would have to be that long narrow fall first.

Mrs. Bugby had often tried to fancy herself sliding down there : and yet it wouldn't be a slide, but a dreadful drop, though at the bottom there was always Mrs. Bugby's friend, if only she dared.

## MRS. BUGBY'S FRIEND

In the bar parlour of 'The Silent Woman,' whenever Mrs. Bugby served Chick, Pim, or Wimple with their drink (Mr. Billy had been carried off as a joke one Christmas day to join hands—for they were buried next to each other—with Mr. Soper, and on a Lady day the bell had tolled for Corbin too), Mrs. Bugby would remember that silent friend of hers in the garden, and would think how cool and still that presence was, and so different from Mr. Bugby.

Mr. Bugby was kind in one way ; he certainly tried his best to overcome his wife's dislike to that narrow deep fall. He would strike her—merely, as he kindly informed her, 'to keep himself in training for the next'—and suggest 'that they well worms be good company to a dead 'oman.'

Mrs. Bugby now let down the bucket, though it seemed to her to be a little hard upon the water to draw it out from its deep silence into the light of noisy day.

With the bucket upon the grass again, Mrs. Bugby looked down once more. She was still looking, when Mrs. Chick's voice came from over the stile—a pleasing opening in the summer hedge—and brought to the scene the pleasantness of a cheerful person's interest in the misery of another.

'Don't 'ee look so long down there,' said Mrs. Chick, 'or something mid happen to 'ee.'

'No, no,' said Mrs. Bugby, as though she



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spoke to some one that Mrs. Chick couldn't see ;  
'I can't do it yet, I can't do it. I would be broken on those hard bricks. I dare not try to fall, I dare not try to fall. . . .'

'You be all shaking,' remarked Mrs. Chick, when Mrs. Bugby carried the pail of water near to the stile and rested. Both the women now looked into the meadow and watched Maud Chick, who hurried to and fro there with that uneasy gait that betokens a troubled mind.

'Bain't Maud no better ?' asked Mrs. Bugby.

''Twas a pity,' said Mrs. Chick, watching her daughter's restless motions, as though Maud were a natural curiosity brought there on purpose to amuse every one—''Twas a pity that Maud did know so little, though she did use to wash an' dress Fred when 'e were a biggish boy.'

Mrs. Bugby still looked at Maud, who had now stopped her rambling walk and was eagerly watching the postman, Mr. Moody, who was conversing with May Billy upon the Madder green, before starting to deliver his afternoon letters.

'Maud were a maid,' said Mrs. Chick, 'that were always thinking about they babies. She never thought on nor know'd, no, not even when she were like a woman be, what 'tis they married men to do. Chick do say that Mr. Bugby—'tain't nothing that I do mean to say against 'im—do tell at "Silent Woman" as 'ow 'e did

## MRS. BUGBY'S FRIEND

frighten she thik day. 'Twas in meadow foot-path'—Mrs. Chick nodded towards Dodder-down—'that landlord did meet she. An' 'e did tell she of a little maid 'e 'd heard a-screaming in they chalk pits across meadow grounds. 'Twas a funny tale, for when Maud an' 'e did go as far as pits there weren't nor child at all.'

Mrs. Chick looked as though she were astonished too, that there 'weren't nor child.'

'A wanting man that do mean to 'ave 'is way wi' a maid be funny to look at.' Mrs. Chick looked at the inn door and nodded amiably at Mr. Bugby, who was sitting in the porch. 'And she wanting a baby so bad too ; and that were a manner of asking for a peep at nature, and when so much be done, 'tis usual that nothing don't happen.'

Mrs. Bugby raised her pail and moved slowly away, with the weary gait of a woman who has looked too long into a deep place, and at her only friend a little too lovingly.

Mrs. Chick pitied her happily, and turned away because she had seen Mr. Moody, the postman, enter the lower end of the field, in order, so Mrs. Chick hoped, to bring her a letter.

Mr. Moody, the Madder postman, had long ago discovered the fact, a very trying one indeed for most simple-minded gentlemen, that young ladies were everywhere in the world.

'When I do try,' he informed Mrs. Moody, 'to think that they bain't about in all times and in

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all places, they do come around I like Christmas cards that bain't proper addressed.'

Mrs. Moody placed the large Bible, that she always carried to chapel and carried home again, upon the front-room table, and rested near it for a moment so that any passing neighbour might see that she gave the Bible a little of her company sometimes.

' 'Tain't nor use,' said Mr. Moody, sitting down too, according to custom, 'me keeping Susy in me eye, nor yet Mrs. Corbin, an' I do try to look at they round white pillars in chapel.'

' You should have looked at the preacher ; 'e were telling of bodies that do rot in grave same whiles as souls do burn in hell.'

' I don't fancy they remarks,' said Mr. Moody.

' Then you should look at me.'

' You be me wife,' replied Mrs. Moody's husband mildly.

But this morning Mr. Moody had come to Madder with a virtuous resolve, though not a new one. He wished to try whether or no a long look at Mrs. Billy, who was grown extremely ill-favoured, could prevent for a while at least his eyes from wandering to younger and more pretty women.

It was unfortunate for Mr. Moody that as soon as ever he had taken this new cure, a good long stare at Mrs. Billy till her cross look was safe lodged in his mind, he should go out directly with his letters, from Mrs. Billy and the

## MRS. BUGBY'S FRIEND

post-office, to encounter May Billy upon the village green.

Mr. Moody stopped at once when he met May, and looked at her. He knew how May liked being a girl, and he knew, for her frock and herself told him this plainly enough, that she was a pretty one.

Mr. Moody let the idea of Mrs. Billy fall out of his mind, and took in May instead, who was ready enough to be admired.

May watched Mr. Moody, and toyed with his wishes as a kitten would do with a piece of straw : handling those wishes with her eyes, exciting them, following them, and drawing them to her. But alas ! when the postman felt himself to be gone as far with May as any public and open-air conversation can decorously go, she laughed loudly.

When once Mr. Moody let his helps to virtue go—which they always did very readily indeed—life became very serious to him, and every movement or expression of the girl he looked at, or talked to, portended such and such a willingness, and all intended for him.

He had just reached a very simple interpretation of May's words and movements when she burst out laughing at him.

That she should laugh at all, at so serious a state of a man's feelings, appeared to Mr. Moody to be a betrayal of all his most interesting secrets. If she had meant to laugh so—and only because

he had invited her to go a little way down the lane, why hadn't she left him at the first, alone, and good, with Mrs. Billy to look at?

Mr. Moody looked at his letters. 'Those letters,' he thought, 'may be as important to some people as May's frock and gestures had been a moment ago to him.'

'Besides,' thought Mr. Moody, whose ideas, when once led on to wantonness, were hard to lay, 'it's the custom in Madder for young women to walk sometimes in the fields, and when I do go across thik, wi' Pim's letter, I may meet one.'

Mr. Moody did meet one. He met Maud. Although Maud's hair was white, she still possessed the rounded firm figure and the graceful movements of a girl: the very attributes that Mr. Moody, with May's body in his eye instead of Mrs. Billy's, hoped to find waiting for him. 'Why, then,' and the Madder sparrows chirped excitedly as they asked the question from the nearest hedgerow, 'did Mr. Moody, when Maud met him and spoke to him, as though she asked a favour, turn from her and hurry away with his hands to his ears, as if he were acting the part of Christian at Vanity Fair?'

Later in the evening, when Mr. Moody sat at his tea-table and looked at the food upon his plate, Mrs. Moody, putting her head a little to one side, said gravely, 'Yes, 'tis bread an' butter on thee's plate; 'tain't worms nor spiders.'

## MRS. BUGBY'S FRIEND

Mr. Moody placed one elbow upon the table, and his cheek into his hand, and stared still at his plate.

'Bread and butter bain't wrong side up?' said Mrs. Moody.

'World be,' said Mr. Moody, finding his voice at last. 'World be sadly twisted.' Mr. Moody sighed deeply.

'All my life long,' said Mr. Moody, looking up at his wife, 'leastways all my letter-carrying time, I've wanted to meet a maiden in they Madder fields who would say kindly, "There be they dark trees for we to go to, Mr. Moody."'

'Wouldn't the kindly maid 'ave called 'ee William?' Mrs. Moody inquired.

''Twere always "Mr. Moody" in me fancy,' her husband replied. ''Twere "Mr. Moody" even on thik happy grass.'

'We bain't got no money to pay for they grassy doings,' said Mrs. Moody a little sulkily.

The postman stared at his plate again. Suddenly he beat his fist upon the table.

'I won't hanker for none of they maids no more,' he cried out. 'I'll mind me letters and postcards.'

'Thee bain't been in no cold wind, 'ave 'ee?' asked Mrs. Moody feelingly, 'for thee's eyes be blinking.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Moody, wiping his eyes. 'Yes, they cold winds did drive into I cruel on they Madder hills.'



*Chapter xxiii*

MR. PIM KNOWS HIS  
GREATNESS

WHEN Mr. Pim carried the letter that had come to him all the way from Derby to 'The Silent Woman,' he was fortunate enough to find Farmer Barfoot in the parlour.

The farmer, with his mug near to him, was inquiring of Betty whether the corn in 'fox holes field' was ready to carry.

' 'Tis they knots in straw that do hold dampness, Betty be telling I,' remarked the farmer, 'so corn be best left on ground a day longer.'

Pim handed his letter to Mr. Barfoot.

'Now Betty 'ave a-spoken,' he said, 'maybe thee 'd read thik to I.'

The inn door darkened, for Chick and Wimple, each wishing to enter at the same moment, were finding some difficulty in doing so. Mr. Chick, however, soon gave place to Wimple, and didn't venture for a moment to enter at all, for that gentleman said brightly, ' 'Tis funny how church-yard clay do stick to woon's clothes.'

When Chick did at last creep in, and took a place as far as possible from the sexton, Farmer Barfoot, with a friendly look at Betty, and moving her a little to an easier position, read the letter.



## MR. PIM KNOWS HIS GREATNESS

‘ Dear Father, and all at home.’ Mr. Pim started, but looking at Betty, who seemed to reprove him, remained silent.

*‘ Dear Father, and all at home,—I do like Derby, I’m having such a fine time with my counting. I lodge in a house with sixty-seven windows, and in the same street where I live there are a thousand and one. I counted all these in one day.*

*‘ I shall soon find some work to do besides my counting, but I’m not in want, you know, because I don’t have to pay anything for my lodgings. You and all may be sure that I shall soon come home very rich indeed. I have only one little trouble, which is that I have lost my cap. I threw it up one evening near to where I live, and it lodged upon some high railings, and that’s where it stayed.*

*‘ When I come home rich I’ll marry Polly, and give to all a great deal of money. I’ll soon be coming home.—Your loving Frederick.’*

Mr. Pim put the letter into his pocket. He turned to Chick.

‘ What ’tis ’ee do want,’ he asked, ‘ for a present when Fred do come in loaded ? ’

Before replying to this kind question, Mr. Chick regarded his legs. Below the knees and over his well-worn trousers he had wound pieces of sacking. He regarded these now with a

## INNOCENT BIRDS

hopeful look, as if by means of Pim they would one day be changed into something better.

'Strap leggings be a good warm wear,' said Mr. Chick.

'You shall have they,' called out Pim, 'when Fred do come in from Spain.' . . .

After Fred's letter was come, Mr. Pim began to look at the ordinary and natural things of life with marked contempt. He scarcely ever gave a thought now to what the weather was doing. Fred's first coming had been wonderful; as coming from the body of dead Annie in a mysterious way, that all Minna's earlier explanations of nature could never wholly account for. But now soon there would be happening a far more stirring event, an event that would give Chick his strap leggings—the second coming of Fred.

Mr. Pim would stand uncertainly sometimes and watch the Madder rooks and starlings and even the swallows, as if to contrast his own fame with theirs, and would say, so that any one might tell where the true glory was to be found, 'They be only poor birds that do lay eggs and hatch 'em.'

Besides the poor birds, Mr. Pim would regard in the new light of Fred's coming almost any other human being that he passed, on the way to or from his work, with a vast contempt. For if May and Eva Billy happened to be walking up the lane, in the happy hopes that some one might whistle after them, and met Pim, he would

## MR. PIM KNOWS HIS GREATNESS

mutter as he went by, 'They be only Madder maidens ; they bain't Queen Maries,' as though to show to whose society he really belonged.

All Madder had heard of Fred's letter, and of another that Polly Wimple had received that was even more hopeful ; because it told how he had bought a new cap, and therefore was no doubt beginning to walk quickly upon the high road to riches. No one, therefore, was very much surprised to hear, a week or two after these letters had arrived, that Mr. Pim had bethought him of the well-known fact, and acted upon it, that no gentleman with a rich son soon coming home would do any more work in the vulgar fields.

This change in Mr. Pim's behaviour toward this workaday world came in this way. He raised his hoe one morning in the turnip field and looked at it in a critical manner, as if it were the very oddest implement in the world for he, Mr. Pim, to be holding. Mr. Pim placed the hoe very gently down upon the ground.

Though it was September the day was very warm. All Madder appeared to sleep under a silky haze that spread everywhere. Mr. Pim lay down and slept too. . . .

Though Madder slept, Betty was wakeful. She informed Farmer Barfoot, with the help of his own eyes, as he stood by his barton gate, that a figure that should be bent like a rather short gallows, to which Bewick would no doubt have hanged a cat or a little dog, didn't show in

## INNOCENT BIRDS

the field at all. It wasn't dinner-time yet, and Betty shrewdly observed 'that no one in such a large field would leave his beer near a hedge four hundred yards away from his work, not even for the sake of taking his cool thin drink under a fresh tree's shade.'

When an hour later Farmer Barfoot woke Pim up, Mr. Barfoot remarked truthfully and harmlessly enough 'that it wasn't Sunday.' And Pim, for the moment at least forgetting who he was, and who was soon to come home, lifted up the discarded hoe and made a motion as though he intended to begin to work at the weeds again. As soon as ever the hoe touched the ground Pim let it fall again. Farmer Barfoot looked from Pim to Betty, and then from Betty to Pim.

Mr. Pim was fully awake now and knew himself. He looked at the Madder valley. The great elms were crowned with gold, the red and white cows lay peacefully where the soft haze warmed the meadows, and Madder hill waited, with the grace of a lonely and lovely virgin, for God's gift to come.

' 'Tain't much that I do want,' said Mr. Pim, regarding all the beauties of Madder with the eye of a land agent. 'But me boy Fred, who did come funny—though thik bain't no matter to I, now 'e be rich—could buy all that be over there an' around—all they small trees and grounds—wi' woon of they bank papers from 's pocket that be all stuffed wi' 'em.'

## MR. PIM KNOWS HIS GREATNESS

' 'Tis more than likely,' said Farmer Barfoot after a look at Betty, 'that Fred 'ave done well for 'imself up Derby way.'

'Better than well,' Mr. Pim replied ; 'for if Fred were to touch they turnips they would be gold woons.' . . .

Madder tries in many little ways, with its rain-clouds and lightnings, with its fan-shaped trees—bare shapes in winter—with its first primrose, that should be wept over rather than plucked, and the January scent of white violet leaves amongst the thorns, together with the little black spots of the plantain shadows upon the sun-warmed grass, to give all the happiness that is in it to those that have eyes to see and noses to smell. It succeeds, indeed, in giving a kind of joy—but alas ! all creatures are so fanciful—to the weasels. And sometimes a stray hedgehog comes along, who finds a worm and is glad of it. And now it attempted, after so many trials with ungrateful man, to give Pim a chance.

'All they be only plain fields,' said Pim. 'And thik bain't nothing, only a small turnip.'

In order to show how little and poor a thing, as beheld from his new and exalted position, a field root was, Mr. Pim kicked this one up and turned to look at Madder hill.

'Hill bain't woon of they paper notes,' he said scornfully.

Mr. Barfoot looked at the hill too. Certainly Pim had said rightly what the hill wasn't.

## INNOCENT BIRDS

From the hill Mr. Pim turned to his master.

'You be Farmer Barfoot, bain't 'ee, who do 'ave Betty to bed wi' 'ee?'

Farmer Barfoot looked proudly down at Betty; he was glad that so grand a man, with so rich a son, should mention his lame foot.

*Chapter xxiv*

MR. SOLLY CONSIDERS

THE longing for motherhood has a cruel way sometimes of playing with a girl, as a cat plays with a mouse. It lets her run free for a moment and then pounces upon her. The longing has a way of saying, even though the mouse may have been frightened by the cat's shining eyes, 'You might have let him do all that he wished under those green bushes, for it didn't matter very much what he did when you longed so !'

Maud's fright had held her back for a while—in torment perhaps, but still it held her ; and now that it was gone, the cat that had captured this little mouse allowed her, though wounded, to run in the fields.

Modesty, that careful sentiment, placed as a sun-dew in a maiden's heart to catch brides—after their human blood is sucked dry—for heaven, now left Maud defenceless.

Maud even wanted to go to Dodderdown again to find the same place that Mr. Bugby had followed her to when he told her that a little child was crying there. Whenever Maud saw Mr. Bugby now, instead of running from him she begged him to go with her into the meadow again. 'She wouldn't struggle this time,' she said, 'but



## INNOCENT BIRDS

would go first to the grassy chalk-pit and wait for him.' She did go, and waited upon the grass until the night dews chilled her, and then she went home to Madder again, and peeped into the inn window, where Mr. Bugby was telling his friends about Maud.

'Though I bain't religious,' she heard Mr. Bugby say, 'I bain't a-going to do what wicked mad Maud do ask.'

'Where be Maud now?' Wimple inquired.

'In Dead Man's Meadow waiting for I,' laughed Mr. Bugby.

Sometimes Maud would meet Mr. Solly, but he would look so sadly at her that even Maud didn't like to ask him to help her with her longings. Something, too, that Solly used to say—and he never passed Maud without speaking—used to give her back a little of her former modesty, as well as a new hope, though a far-away one. Whenever he met Maud, who would be out looking, or else waiting, for a man, Mr. Solly would stop in the road and look up at Madder hill, with a depth of longing expressed in his look that almost equalled Maud's own.

'Look, Maud,' he would say, 'look up there at Madder hill.' And Maud, of course, did what Solly wished her to do, and watched the hill. And while she looked Solly would still be speaking.

'He will come again,' Solly said, with conviction, 'and even if His gift is for Polly and

## MR. SOLLY CONSIDERS

Fred this time, His mercy is infinite and His promises are sure ; and one day He will remember us too.'

There was something in the tone of Mr. Solly's voice that would make Maud forget herself, and indeed all Madder, yea, and all the world, for a few short moments. But when her mortal longings and her deferred hope brought her eyes to earth again, she would discover, very much to her disappointment, that Solly was gone.

But though Solly might have fled to Gift Cottage a little precipitately, as if he wished to get away from mad Maud and her longings, yet he spent a good deal of his time in considering what could best be done to help Maud in her trouble.

'Now, if only those Americans,' he thought one day, as he dug in his garden, 'hadn't commenced to manufacture iron, they might have helped to aid Maud Chick with a little advice.'

'But of course there is Aunt Crocker !' Mr. Solly thought of her as his clean shining spade cut the ground so nicely.

He remembered one evening in particular when his aunt described to him how Mr. Crocker had died. It was a stormy winter's evening, when the wind and rain outside in the street did its best to make Mrs. Crocker's parlour more than usually comfortable. Solly was sitting beside the fire, that he had replenished a moment before with a fine log of oak, sawed by his own

## INNOCENT BIRDS

hands with much care so that it might exactly fit the parlour fire-place. Mrs. Crocker was knitting with large wooden needles, that gave a gentle grace to the home, as unlike as possible to the sharp biting clash of Miss Pettifer's steel ones.

The storm outside rattled the windows in a merry fashion, and certain inquisitive drops of rain crept down the chimney, where they fell and hissed spitefully upon Solly's log. Mrs. Crocker moved one of her feet from the rug, that had once kept a bear warm, and placed it next to her other upon the footstool. She then settled her ball of wool in her lap, with as much consideration as though it were a soft white kitten.

'Crocker was never a proud man,' she said, laying down the knitting beside the ball of wool, 'and he never thought his name was a pretty one.'

"But there was somewhere," he used to say, "where it might show itself off with more justice than upon a rate receipt."

'It was a rough windy night, as this is, when Crocker died.'

Mr. Solly touched the poker.

'No, the log is burning well,' Mrs. Crocker said; 'let it alone, Solly.'

'He hadn't spoken for some time, you know, and the doctor had told me, and the wild winds were telling me too, that the end was near. "Deborah," he said, suddenly raising himself

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up in bed, and looking at me as happily as if he had just discovered a truth he had looked for all his life, "it's the very name for a tombstone." "

Mrs. Crocker looked at Solly's log, that was burning finely then.

A fierce gust of wind shook the house.

'And also his wife Deborah Crocker,' she said gratefully.

*Chapter xxv*

ANOTHER BIRD FOR  
MR. BUGBY

ONE has only to wink once or twice, and the summer is gone. Gone, with all its yellow gladness that it gave, and gone with all its yellow sadness too. But gone ; and so quickly each summer's going is, that we have only to wink the three times, and our lives are gone too, with their early morning sunshine and their long evening shadows.

If so be any happiness has been found by us during our three winks, we have found it—and we all know this to be true—in quiet places. We have met it—if at all—where the fir-cones lie about so kindly that we are almost inclined under those tall and sweet-scented trees to kneel down and worship the earth.

Perhaps upon the warm grassy side of a hill in March, with the cold wind banished behind it, the doors of our soul may have opened for a breath of joy to come in. Or when the bracken first breaks through the soil upon the heath ; or when Madder hill, at midnight, makes a black line athwart the stars. If our joy enters not into us at those times, we may bid it farewell for ever. . . .

## ANOTHER BIRD FOR MR. BUGBY

Nearly all the leaves were fallen, and Madder sulked like a girl who is forced to wear sackcloth instead of bright colours. The fan-shaped trees had fancied—foolish trees—that when spring came and they sprouted greenly, they were going to live for ever as prettily. But an old worm who had lived in the hollow trunk of one of the largest elms knew better. The worm told the trees to wait a little until the autumn came, and then see what would happen to their pretty green covering.

When Madder sulks, as it did upon this autumn day that we have now reached in our story, even the church tower cannot cull the slightest spark of interest from the fact that it possesses a bell that is rung on Sundays, and a flagstaff where a flag is hung upon the king's birthday.

But even the greyest of autumn days doesn't always succeed in keeping the Devil away from Madder ; and though no flag was flying and no bell rang, the church tower was awaked from its gloomy thoughts by the arrival of a bird.

This bird, one of a sea tribe that had visited Madder before, perhaps mistook the green fields of Madder for waves, and the church tower for a great rock set up in this green sea.

The bird flapped its wings, stretched them widely out, and appeared to be looking greedily at Madder rectory.

Certainly the cormorant needn't have looked so greedily there, for even the Devil was likely

to get short commons at Miss Pettifer's, although that very afternoon she intended to send Polly to meet Mr. Balliboy, the Norbury carrier, in the main road under the hill, to fetch the bones. For threepence, with an extra twopence for the carrier, Miss Pettifer was able to provide, with a few potatoes, a dinner for Polly, if only she took enough trouble about cooking it, for six days out of the seven.

Miss Pettifer held Polly so nailed to the kitchen table, as though it were a cross, that when Polly did find herself out of doors going for the bones, she could not avoid the pleasure of playing upon a bank near to the inn, with a tiny puppy that Susy's nephew Tom led with a string.

Polly played with the puppy as though it were a summer's day instead of an autumn one, and as if she were ten years old instead of near twenty.

Often it happens that a child is so happy playing that she doesn't know when she is being watched. And if it so happens that a simple person, who thinks of himself but as a leaf in the wide tree—say a Mr. Solly—sees her, and notes the excitement of a girl's pleasure as a bright shining star in a night's blackness, and goes to his home comforted, though a man, then a girl's joy has once more befriended a poor sinner. But, and if the watcher be of another kind, events may happen that show a game as a pretty chance for the Evil One.



## ANOTHER BIRD FOR MR. BUGBY

Mr. Bugby liked Mrs. Chick. He was standing near to her now and watching Polly.

Nature had provided Mrs. Chick with a tongue as well as with a body that even now could please the men.

'Chick be a fool,' remarked the lady, 'for 'e do want they strap leggings, same as thik Polly do hanker for Fred Pim, and same as silly Maud do want a baby.'

' 'Tis a world of wanting,' replied philosophical Mr. Bugby, who remembered the brandy bottle that the Norbury carrier was to bring as far as the turning to Madder that very afternoon.

'There bain't no brandy in house now ; 'tis finished,' he said.

'You be going to meet carrier, then ?'

Mr. Bugby nodded.

The bird that had perched upon the church tower flew round the village and settled upon Madder hill.

'Wants do come,' said Mrs. Chick, 'from what others do have, and I do tell silly Maud that if she wasn't mad she 'd be married.

'There be thik merry maid too'—Mr. Bugby was watching Polly—'that be so clean and tidy now, and 'twill all be extra washing for I wi' she a-playing wi' Tom's puppy.

' 'Tis they Sunday ones,' said Mrs. Chick crossly, who always showed a mother's interest in underclothes when she was near a man, ' 'tain't

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they week-day's, for they bain't frilled same as they Sunday's be.'

Mr. Bugby's eyes followed Mrs. Chick's looking.

'She be going to fetch they bones and margarine,' said Mrs. Chick.

Mrs. Chick spoke truly. Mr. Balliboy was bringing a pound of margarine as well as the bones to Miss Pettifer.

Polly kissed the puppy, fondled it lovingly for a moment, and handed it to Tom with a sigh. Having been playing so long with the puppy, there was now need for her to hurry. She ran past the inn, as she had once ran in the meadow when Mr. Bugby was watching.

Mr. Bugby watched her now. . . .

As Mr. Balliboy handed Polly Miss Pettifer's parcel under the hill, he said, in a tone of concern, looking beyond Polly and up the Madder lane, 'There be wold Bugby coming, but where the hell be brandy bottle?'

In order to fetch out the bottle, Mr. Balliboy climbed backwards into the car and felt amongst the legs of his customers.

'Brandy bottle were under seat safe enough,' he remarked to Polly, when his head and half his body appeared again, 'but where be en now?'

Mr. Balliboy sniffed and looked suspiciously at an old lady from Norbury, a Mrs. Morsay, under whose legs he had placed Mr. Bugby's

## ANOTHER BIRD FOR MR. BUGBY

brandy an hour before. Mr. Balliboy put his head into the car and sniffed again. Inside the car there was an unmistakable vinous odour.

‘No one haven’t drank poor landlord’s bottle?’ he asked, bringing out his head again, and looking up at the dull sky as though he thought the thief lived there.

But as no answer came to Mr. Balliboy’s question, either from the sky or from the car, he sat down in his seat and said to Polly as the car moved away, ‘I best be a-going, for thik Bugby be the woon to frighten poor ’omen, an’ Mrs. Morsay be timid.’

When Mr. Bugby reached the road he saw Mr. Balliboy’s car turn the corner and go out of sight.

But though the brandy bottle was gone, Polly Wimple was still there. The reason why she wasn’t half-way up the Madder downs by this time was a simple one. The string that had tied Miss Pettifer’s parcel of bones together was loosened, and one bone—that perhaps wished for burial—had fallen by the roadside. Polly wasn’t the kind of girl to leave anything behind her, and so she found the bone and fastened the parcel again, tying to it as well the pound of margarine.

Owing to the escape of this bone, Mr. Bugby came up to Polly when the parcel was safely tied again. The two walked together, but without speaking to one another.

There are other ways of thinking about a young

girl who walks by one's side in the country than the poet Wordsworth's. Mr. Bugby thought by a law of custom. That is to say, he always pursued the same road of thought before he reached to the consummation of his desires. He regarded each new girl that he went with as a mysterious circle of wonders, to be unwrapped, frightened into docility, and at last utterly rent and discovered.

Above the great road that leads elsewhere, and near to the top of the long Madder down over which Mrs. Pim was carried, there is a pretty copse. The trees in this little copse are covered with ivy, that gives a dark pleasant shade or shelter to any wayfarer who wishes to rest there. This little copse is far enough away from Madder village to prevent any one who wishes to read *Wood and Stone* or *Marius the Epicurean* from being disturbed there. It is also a suitable spot for young lovers to retire to upon a happy Sunday.

Upon each side of the lane outside the copse there are steep banks ; and these banks have often provided the Madder children, who wander sometimes quite a long distance in fine weather, with a chance to roll.

Darkness, and even twilight that is deepening into darkness, produces sometimes dim forms that appear human, and yet they may be but tree stumps or hedgerow shadows.

Near to these high banks, and in the growing

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and shadowy darkness, the landlord of 'The Silent Woman' touched Polly. Polly screamed, ran up the bank, but was caught by the foot.

She struggled, escaped again, for she was young and strong. She ran a few yards up the road and then stopped. Polly stopped because there was a large black bird in the road—a bird whose proper situation in nature is the sea, where it is credited by certain writers with an abnormal will to devour.

Upon such a darkening evening the bird appeared to be larger than its usual size, as it is seen in its natural home ; and its being there at that hour was not the sort of sight to cheer a girl's feelings who is trying to escape a ravisher.

The bird stretched out its neck, spread its wings, as this species will often do upon a rock at sea, and Polly was caught from behind. . . .

Near to the high banks, and in the copse by the roadside, a large spider lived in a hollow tree. This spider had by nature and inheritance an interest in another form of natural life—the flies. The place of his retreat being so well chosen, and this interest of his so often and so easily consummated, he—for happy spiders even can be troubled by idleness—was sometimes dissatisfied with life.

Ever since this spider had seen Farmer Mew carrying a lamed sheep upon his back down the Maddar fields—for he used to live that side of the hill—the wise spider had decided that man

## INNOCENT BIRDS

was but a larger creation of his own kind, though of course more greedy, for the spider considered himself, as is usual with well-fed people, as but a moderate eater.

The spider looked out of his web—his eyes were like tiny beads of fire—in order to see what Mr. Bugby did with the struggling fly he had carried into the copse. . . .

The spider watched until Mr. Bugby left the girl, who lay as still now as any fly that he had laid out in his nest ; and then he left the shelter of his web to see what had happened.

When the spider left his web, the footsteps of Mr. Bugby could be heard going jauntily down the Madder hill towards the village.

Mr. Bugby was whistling.

## SCATTERED BONES

THE spider, who noticed how disordered Polly's clothes were, and how quiet she seemed to be, let himself drop out of his web so that he might see what had happened. He crawled along Polly's body until he came to her face. He waited for a moment upon her neck, and then slowly pursued his way of discovery upon her cheek.

Polly sat up and shook the spider away from her, who hurried to his web again, deciding meanwhile that Mr. Bugby was a worse workman than he ; or—and there always was this doubt—could the victim sting ?

Polly wondered vaguely why she wasn't crying. Why couldn't she cry ? She had cried at other times ; she had cried when Fred went away, and he had even counted her tears. But no tears came now to be counted.

When all is broken and rent in a moment, thoughts will sometimes come from the past, of joyful hours, that do but heighten the present misery of the wronged one.

Fred, where was Fred ? And she had kept all of herself so safe for him !

There was the time upon the grassy bank, when the honeysuckle scented the shy Madder



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lane, and when a cow's mooing even could sound soft and warm. She had drunk of Fred's lips then as from a deep spring, so that even the shaggy great head of Farmer Barfoot's bull Frederick—for every bull of his was called by that name—that peeped over the hedge looked on with awe and reverence when she promised to give all of herself one day to Fred.

'I will never speak to any one else,' she had said, 'and no one has ever kissed me but you, Fred.'

And once, too, but that was in the meadow and under the very trees that Mr. Moody had so set his heart upon visiting, she knew that she had nearly been killed by a kiss. It was a kiss that awakened all the hopes of her body into singing, and carried her suddenly into the magic circle of being called Love and Death, that are the two realities of life. But these realities, that Mrs. Crocker had always bid Solly think kindly of, couldn't hold a girl for more than a moment or two ; for a country girl must work, and so Polly had to go to Miss Pettifer.

Miss Pettifer ; the bones ; a careful mistress. A careful mistress, who had inherited a nice income from a gentleman who sat all day upon his chairs. Of course she would want to know what had happened to those bones ; and she wouldn't be likely even to forget about the margarine, the sight of which had so much reminded Mrs. Morsay of the Great War that

## SCATTERED BONES

she was compelled reluctantly to make the discovery that Mr. Bugby's bottle was a screw-topped one.

Polly Wimple now looked at these bones in a dull manner. She had held the parcel all the time that Mr. Bugby was after her, her loyalty to her mistress forbade her to let that go. They all now lay about under the trees, and one or two had a little red flesh that still stuck to them.

'You get quite a lot of meat for your threepence,' Miss Pettifer used to tell her servant.

Polly wondered curiously what her own bones would look like if they were so carelessly scattered. She remembered how her father had once brought home a bone that he informed his little girl at the tea-table 'to be a funny woon.'

'Twere farmer's grandmother's,' he explained, 'who did have a foot like farmer's : only in they back-times farmer's family weren't grave-stone folk same as they be now, wi' their money.'

Why no, a young girl's bones would never look in the least like a cow's ; and Fred had once said, when they lay together under those shady trees, that she hadn't got any. 'You bain't got no bones,' said Fred. 'You be all nice.'

Polly felt her arm ; it wasn't a large arm, but it was plump and firm as a girl's should be. She touched it with her lips ; but was it her own arm that she touched ? She wondered if it was. She felt her hair, that had fallen down, and tried to

fasten it. But the hairpins were all fallen out, so she platted her hair instead, as she used to do before the servant's looking-glass when she went to bed. She was going to bed. There was so much to do that day, so much housework to do for Miss Pettifer. Why, of course, she had been scrubbing the bedrooms, so that was why she felt so tired.

Had the evening come, and would she soon be going out to meet him? Perhaps Fred was come home from Derby? It was a little hard of Miss Pettifer to send him there, but it would be so nice if he came home very rich.

Oh, she had buttered the toast for Miss Pettifer's tea with margarine; that was a silly mistake to make, and all because she was thinking how much she loved Fred.

Why was all so silent? There should be the kettle singing, and Miss Pettifer's bell might ring at any moment.

Oh, that bell! It would ring so sharply, and always break into the middle of some of her prettiest thoughts about Fred.

Oh, how she had wanted Fred, and how foolishly Mrs. Chick would talk about marriage. And yet even those words of hers had made sun-kissed Polly want Fred the more.

'Tain't nothing to hurt a maiden, marriage bain't,' Mrs. Chick would say, laughing loudly.

But why couldn't she cry now?

No, she couldn't cry; she couldn't think any

## SCATTERED BONES

more of Fred, though, because something had happened to her ; she was no longer a nice girl for Fred to touch ; she was different now. She couldn't cry ; her tears were done with and gone ; she was like these scattered bones that had a little flesh still sticking to them.

Sounds now came by, and Polly listened dully to them. Some one was walking in the lane going to Madder.

She trembled, and the steps went by. She couldn't have called out even though the steps were Fred's ; and they did seem to sound a little like his.

Those steps were gone, and something snapped in Polly, as if a thin golden cord that bound her being together—with Fred's, of course—had stretched and broken.

The evening was grown still, but with the ominous stillness that tells of a storm that is coming. Polly heard another sound that fell into stillness, but came again more and more insistently. She listened, and the sound grew louder, more weighted with heaviness, and more clamorous in its call for the victim of the night.

Polly had heard the sea waves before when a storm was either coming or else dying down in Madder.

She crawled slowly out of the wood. The mist had cleared for the moment, and the stars were shining. Polly had twisted her ankle during her struggle with the landlord of 'The Silent Woman,'

## INNOCENT BIRDS

and she now discovered how much it pained her.

But she couldn't see Fred any more, and those waves called to her.

Something came near that licked her face. She had swooned again, she supposed. Polly raised herself from the ground, feeling better. Tim, the sheep-dog, bounded about her.

'Go, Tim, go,' she said ; 'go to Fred.'

The dog bounded away.

*Chapter xxvii*

FRED PIM COMES HOME  
TO MADDER

ALTHOUGH Fred tried his best to feel grateful to Miss Pettifer for getting him to Derby, he couldn't help wishing from the very moment he set foot in that city that he was back again in Madder.

Even though he had the pleasure, and Fred was a good boy, of counting all the windows in the Derby workhouse—and we hope for the credit of the Madder national school that he counted them correctly—yet, strange though it may sound to those who have a liking for simple arithmetic, Fred was not happy. Besides Polly—and his heart was hers—he missed a sheep. This sheep was a naughty one ; it would place its front feet upon the hurdles, and would try to eat upon that day's forbidden ground whatever there was it could reach to. Fred would drive it away from the hurdles by throwing his cap at it, but the sheep, that liked a game as well as Fred, only tried elsewhere to break out.

' 'Tis a badly brought-up sheep,' Fred would tell Farmer Barfoot, when, by the means of this one, all the sheep were in the mangels. ' And I've threatened to forget to count en one of these days.'

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'If thik sheep were left on bare downs and never brought into fold, 'twould teach 'e manners, Betty do say,' the farmer replied.

Whenever Fred thought of this sheep he counted the windows of Derby faster than ever.

In a fine town like Derby, where there are a great many windows, there are also a great many young ladies who sometimes, though not often, look out of the windows.

'When I 've finished the windows,' thought Fred, 'I 'll begin to count the girls.'

After living some months in Derby, Fred succeeded at last in earning two shillings. These two shillings were presented to Fred by a business gentleman whose purse, stuffed with bank-notes to the value of some hundreds of pounds, Fred had found and returned to him. Showing this florin where he lodged, Fred was ordered out into the street.

It was a cold evening, for late autumn was come, and Fred wandered about the town carrying his cap in his hand—the new one that he had bought when he first came to Derby, but had never felt his own heart high enough to throw up.

Under a railway bridge, where he hoped to get a little shelter from the rain, he encountered a young lady huddled up in a corner. There just happened to be the faintest look of Polly about the young lady's hair that made Fred decide to leave Derby the very next day.



## FRED PIM COMES HOME TO MADDER

He decided to walk to Madder and count the milestones he passed. When one is young and going on foot by road, happy thoughts run on before and scatter the way with flowers. Even though a youth may be tired with walking along the great highway that leads from the heart of England towards the western coast, such happy thoughts can go before him and make the way seem easy.

Besides counting the milestones—and Fred, mistrusting for the first time in his life his own memory, put a tiny stone into his pocket whenever he passed one—he saw before him Madder upon the Sunday. His father—Fred smiled, for he knew all about his father's doubt—would be leaning over the meadow gate, and, though apparently watching mere nothingness, would see all that went on. Polly would come out of the rectory with her head bent a little, as if she wasn't quite certain of the habits of her new hat. She would walk with Maud to Dodderdown church and talk, of course, about Fred and Derby.

When Fred's stones began to grow heavy, he kept one large one for a hundred, and went on again counting the units. Sometimes he slept in the same sort of lodging that he was used to in Derby, and at other times upon warmer nights under a convenient haystack.

Passing one day through a long straggling village of farms and cottages, and going by a large green where geese were feeding, Fred

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knocked at a cottage door near to a farmhouse with a high roof and red tiles and a white gate that reminded him of Mr. Solly's. He asked for food.

'You bain't never farmer's boy Jim come home, be 'ee?' inquired excitedly the woman who opened the door.

'No,' said Fred.

'Then go along,' said the woman.

Fred went along ; but 'going along' wasn't food, so that at the next cottage, a lime-washed one a hundred yards away, he knocked again.

At this cottage Fred was asked, in almost the same words as at the last, if he were Jim.

The farther he went down the country the more he thought what his own happiness would be like when he reached Madder. He looked curiously at every country hill as if to try to discover any resemblance to the hill at Madder.

If Fred passed any person, simple-minded and poor enough to be walking as he was, whose moustache in the least resembled Mr. Solly's, he would tell him 'how he was Fred Pim, a shepherd who once had the charge of a large flock of sheep, and was just then employed in walking home from Derby.'

As Fred proceeded farther he became more and more expectant, and looked excitedly at the rooks. When the rooks flew the way he was going, he fancied that they were his sheep and that he was driving them to Madder, but when

## FRED PIM COMES HOME TO MADDER

they wheeled round and began to fly in another direction, he called out that they were 'all as bad as Miss Pettifer,' and threw his cap at them.

In one village at nightfall, a village that slept beside a deep green hill, that appeared to hold the cottages in its lap and be always crying over them, Fred saw in a window a lamp burning that reminded him of Susy's.

The look of that lamp, with a mere glass and no globe, and with one side blackened by smoke as Susy's always was, told Fred more truly than any map could have done that he was nearing home, and he couldn't help waiting a moment or two to look at that lamp.

And the next day, after a night in a woodshed, he met a man with a club foot, a farmer, who informed Fred, when he asked him, that he and Farmer Barfoot of Maddar possessed the same great-grandmother.

Just as a voyager upon unknown seas beholds signs that betoken the presence of land near, so did Fred Pim meet men and other matters that told him that he was nearing his home.

And even when a clergyman, who had lost his sermon on the way to church, told Fred, who found it for him, that he wasn't Mr. Tucker's brother but only his second cousin, Fred's gladness was so great that he hindered an hour in listening to the sermon, that was both long and dull.

## INNOCENT BIRDS

A few miles from Madder, when Fred had two large stones in his pocket and many little ones, he came upon the first man whose face he knew. This man's name was Pring, who was a mender of roads.

The Fred who had counted Polly's tears, and carried his bundle over the hill to go to Derby, was a different Fred now. His beard had grown raggedly, to keep in countenance, out of kindness no doubt, the other rags that he wore. His cheeks were sunken, and his body grown so thin that his own, or supposed father, could never have known him. Fred, who had not looked into any mirror since he left Derby, hardly realised his altered appearance until he met Pring, but coming near to the road-mender, he saw plainly enough that he was not recognised.

Beside Mr. Pring there was half a loaf of bread and some cheese, left over from his dinner. Pring, whose work for the day was over, placed his spade across his knees, and looked at the implement with thoughtful affection.

Fred was hungry and sat down beside Mr. Pring. Fred knew Madder ways pretty well, and hoping to get a bite he looked at the spade too, as though it were the one and only thing that he had travelled to and from Derby in order to see.

Mr. Pring handed the spade to Fred, who looked at it still more attentively. The spade was old and worn.

## FRED PIM COMES HOME TO MADDER

'Thik spade bain't a spade,' said the road-mender, 'for 'tis a maiden. Though I bain't no man to talk to strange tramping folks, I'll tell 'ee who spade be.'

A car came by, and Mr. Pring rubbed some dirt that the car had thrown up out of his eyes.

'Spade's name be Rose,' he said.

Another car came by, and Mr. Pring looked at it as he always did at every car ever since he had worked upon the roads. This car cast more mud than ever at Mr. Pring.

The road-mender took the spade upon his knees again and stroked the handle; his eyes blinked because of the mud that had been thrown into them.

'Rose be got wooden,' he said; 'but she did use to 'ave pretty ways when biding wi' we.'

Mr. Pring looked across the road at a stile in the hedge. He took up his loaf and knife, and cutting off a large slice, handed this to Fred.

'Rose did tell I to give it 'ee,' he said.

Fred walked another mile or two and sat down to eat his bread. He felt at home again.

It had all been so real in Derby; even the very pavement told true stories about life, true stories about the girls that Fred had never counted. How real that one was under the bridge—much too real. All the real things of the city had bitten into Fred, with their dull crooked fangs; but he was now come again to where Miss Pettifer alone struck the note of reality.

## INNOCENT BIRDS

A mouse peeped out of its hole and began to eat of the crumbs that Fred had let fall. As the mouse ate it looked at Fred inquisitively.

'You bide at home,' said Fred to the mouse. 'Don't you never listen to Miss Pettifer, and don't you never go to no Derby.'

The mouse looked round nervously, finished the crumb, and ran into its hole again.

'Miss Pettifer's only a cat,' said Fred, and threw his cap in the air.

The evening was turned to night as Fred Pim walked up the hill towards Madder. He knew he wasn't returned rich, and Mr. Pring had not even known him as 'Fred.'

'But at least,' he thought, 'I shall see my father.' For Fred had never believed more than to smile at his father's doubts. And then there would be his Polly at Miss Pettifer's, and the dog Timmy up at the farm. Would the sheep be there too, the one that he had thought so much of at Derby? Perhaps it was even now letting all the others out into the turnips.

Near to the top of the hill, and beside the high banks, Fred picked up a package in the lane.

This was the margarine that had slipped out of Polly's parcel when she was dragged to the wood.

When Fred reached the top of the hill he threw the packet into the fields.

## FRED PIM COMES HOME TO MADDER

‘ It ’s Miss Pettifer’s,’ said Fred aloud. ‘ But she ’ll have to give Polly fresh butter to-morrow.’

Something moaned behind him in the little wood. Fred stopped, turned for a moment ; but the sound not being repeated, he walked on again down the hill.



*Chapter xxviii*  
MISTER PIM

MR. PIM waited a moment. He had climbed the garden stile before Chick. Mr. Chick had stood back a little, because he knew that Pim had a son who would some day come home very rich from Derby in Spain.

Mr. Chick remarked, as he stood back there too to let Mr. Pim enter the inn first, 'that he thought it was going to snow.'

Mr. Chick had a habit of always saying 'it was going to snow' when the weather was unusually mild.

Mr. Pim sat at the head of the table, where he could be easily seen by any one who wished to have the honour of filling his cup, and where he could see the black glove left behind by the former landlord, Mr. Told, and preserved for his own hoped-for use by Mr. Bugby.

This glove—a symbol of his happy wishes—Mr. Bugby kept upon the picture of the member of Parliament for the Weyminster district, a gentleman who was once found at a social gathering shaking hands with the overcoats.

Farmer Barfoot now knocked with a shilling upon the table, and Wimple, who was sitting near by, nodded at the shilling. Farmer Barfoot

called for some drink. Mr. Pim withdrew his eyes from the black glove when Mrs. Bugby brought in the jug, and looked at her. Wimple looked at her too, and made a gesture as if he held out a tape measure to get her right length for the grave.

Mrs. Bugby took down the mugs from their nails and placed them on the table. The men watched her. She still lived.

It is always nice to live in the exciting expectation of a startling event. It is pleasant, too, to exchange opinions around an inn table as to exactly how and where the event will take place. And even if one is the person doomed—and lucky to live in Madder such a doomed one is—he or she can often wallow in the same morbid pool as well as the other watchers.

‘Betty do tell I,’ said Farmer Barfoot in a low tone when Mrs. Bugby was gone, ‘that the poor ’oman will walk woon day, when the sun do shine, up to wold owls’ barn and hang sheself.’

‘’Tis a barn,’ remarked Wimple in a discreet voice, just to show how right the farmer always was, ‘w’ere a rope do hang that poor Job did make use on because there weren’t but one apple on ’s tree in ’s garden, and ’e did used to swear to all ’twas a good tree.’

‘They poor gloomy owls do perch there,’ said Pim, ‘for when I was a poor man, and used to work for farmer, I did see they on thik large beam in barn.’

## INNOCENT BIRDS

Mr. Chick stretched out his legs and looked sadly at the sacking that was bound about them.

'I do see,' he said, in a tone that the prophet Jeremiah might have been proud of, 'a wide rushing river, that do run under the arches of a wold bridge; 'tis to wide deep river that poor 'oman will go.'

'She be always looking into garden well,' said Farmer Barfoot, leaving Betty, because of the excitement of the subject, out of the conversation; 'an' no doubt there be water in en.'

'There be deep water in en,' said Chick.

'True, there be,' remarked Pim grandly.

Mrs. Bugby, being nicely placed where the deep water was, the company looked at Mister Pim.

Confirmation had come about Pim's riches that very day, undoubted proofs being received by Farmer Barfoot and by Susy, the church cleaner.

At Stonebridge market that very afternoon, when Farmer Barfoot, with Betty safely tucked into the trap, was taking the reins into his hands, John the hostler, whose roundness grew rounder each market day, and his nose redder, inquired excitedly, 'Do 'ee know Pim of Madder, who did use to go about town asking a question of nature?' Farmer Barfoot, taking a rein in each hand, nodded.

'Questioning Pim be Mister Pim now,' said John, stepping out of the way of the wheel.

In the morning, too, old Teddy, whose fancy

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amongst other oddities was to go about the country saying that Miss Pettifer was in love with him, and that he wasn't going to be like good Joseph, called at Susy's cottage to try and sell her a pair of bootlaces. Teddy found Susy sitting upon a box in her woodshed, looking more wide than ever because of the lowness of the shed, and employing her time in teaching a puppy, the same puppy that Polly had played with, to say the Lord's Prayer.

'Our Father,' repeated Susy.

'Bain't bootlaces,' said Teddy, who had changed his position from the cottage door to the woodshed without being noticed by Susy.

'No, 'e bain't bootlaces,' said 'Teddy, and Susy smiled, knowing well enough, though she was so simple, that God didn't mind what 'Teddy said.

The puppy barked, being annoyed at this interruption of its lesson.

'If I were as rich as Mr. Pim,' remarked Teddy, 'twould be Our Father Teddy, wi' most of next year's babies.'

Susy laughed, for both she and God Almighty liked poor Teddy.

'I be getting too wold for they manners,' she said.

'Not when nights be dark,' replied 'Teddy, showing his bootlaces to the little dog, and telling it how much they cost him to buy, and how little he got when he sold them.

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Teddy's belief and the hostler's remark now bore the human thoughts at 'The Silent Woman' to Mr. Pim.

'How will rich Fred come to Madder?' asked Farmer Barfoot of Pim.

'Riding,' replied Pim.

With their imagination quickened by the beer, the company saw this event in different ways.

Farmer Barfoot, who had seen a picture paper that morning, expected Fred to come riding upon an Indian elephant, as the young prince in the picture was doing; Wimple, who remembered a word or two in Mr. Tucker's last sermon, saw Fred's carriage as a fiery chariot; and Chick saw it as a great car filled with strap leggings, and all intended for him.

Clouds of tobacco wreaths, like haloes, hung about each man's head, the most dense and blue-coloured encircling Mr. Pim as if to show to all present that he was above the common. His mind was filled with great and rich thoughts. Even the very mugs upon the table took upon them a new grandeur when he looked at them, as though they were made of gold. Indeed his thoughts of late had risen high: he lived as a gentleman.

'Had he not been picked out from all Madder,' thought Pim, 'as the one to be envied?' His first separation from the crowd came with the shining glass and black varnish of the wonderful

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carriage that brought Annie. And was not he, 'Pim,' known in all that part of the country as the man who couldn't believe that it really was doing 'just thik,' with the kindly aid of one or other of the pretty Annies, that brought a child into the world? And who was it but Mr. Pim that was bold and orthodox enough—although the Church had always insisted that the thing was possible—to credit to the Father of all for the second time in two thousand years a human begetting? Even though he was called from the stony ground of the Maddar hills, Pim's new theology had carried him far; as far, indeed, as any countryman with a walking-stick, and a rich gait copied from Squire Kennard and landlord Bugby, could go.

Nothing now could burst the bubble of Pim's glory, unless it were the unlucky return of Fred in poverty; but the chance of such an unlikely ending never entered Mr. Pim's head for one moment.

Farmer Barfoot now took his pipe out of his mouth, and knocked it gently upon his odd-shaped boot as though he knocked at the door of Betty's mind. Bending down his head sideways, in a way that might have appeared comical to any sober gentleman, had one been there, Mr. Barfoot listened, and nodded three times. Raising his head again, the farmer coughed. Evidently Betty must have spoken. Moving back a little in order to give himself more room, Farmer

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Barfoot slowly raised Betty and placed her upon the table amongst the mugs. This raising of Betty being done with all proper care and ceremony, as a priest would elevate the Host, Mr. Barfoot, with a faith that would gladden the heart of any true Catholic, remarked mysteriously that 'Betty be talking.'

'What be it Betty do say?' asked Mr. Chick, with a befitting gravity.

'Betty do say,' affirmed the farmer, 'that though all we do fill Pim's mug for 'e, yet there be something that they rich men do always fancy that Pim bain't a-gotten.'

Mr. Chick looked at his legs; he wondered whether Betty was going to say 'gaiters.'

'Women!' shouted Farmer Barfoot.

The farmer turned to Pim in triumph, who in his turn regarded Betty with a slight but unmistakable frown.

'Be they tothers,' he inquired, 'made different to me Annie who were brought home to Madder so proper?'

'Betty do say,' said Farmer Barfoot, 'that the difference bain't all in their clothes.'

Mr. Pim's frowns left him, and he grew thoughtful.

'I do mind Minna,' said Mr. Pim, with a sigh that showed that even a rich father could regret the past at certain times; 'twas the day of the Norbury flower-show.

'Tw'as a rainy day, and Minna did say to I,



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“ Wold Potten’s shed be a good dry place for we two to go to.”

“ “ T’ other maidens bain’t same as I,” Minna did say, when we were sitting in a coffin that were stuck up against shed wall.

“ “ ’Tis a white frock you be wearing,” I did tell she.

“ “ But grandfer do say that though I be different, I be nice.”

“ “ John be the woon for thik nice,” I did tell she. An’ ’twas a pity coffin were stuck up so silly, for ’e did fall sideways and brought Potten back into shed.’

‘ Betty be speaking,’ said the farmer, holding up his hand to silence Pim. ‘ ’Twould be right an’ proper—they be Betty’s words—for rich Pim to ’ave all they young maidens drove upstairs to ’im in flocks an’ herds’—‘ And teams,’ said Chick, who was a carter—‘ then all they differences an’ doubtings would be clear as heavenly sun to ’im.’

‘ So ’twould,’ said Wimple, whose imagination ran high in Pim’s service.

Pim looked at Betty and slowly shook his head.

‘ But be poor Annie real gone ? ’ he inquired in a soft voice of the farmer’s deformed foot ; ‘ for Mr. Thomas Tucker do sometimes name a place called “ heaven ” in ’s sermon, and maybe ’tis there that me Annie do bide and wait for I.’

‘ No, ’tis in ground she do bide,’ said Wimple,

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who didn't like the idea of his mystery being encroached upon by any heavenly vision.

But Mr. Pim's unbelief in nature's affairs overcame Wimple's earth-born argument.

'Annie bain't gone for always,' he said sternly.

'But a rich man must do same as t' others,' remarked Chick, who had a secret fear that the piety of Pim's last remark might lead him to forget the promised gift.

'Tis a hard trouble to be rich,' said Pim, in a true rich man's tone.

'Do Betty allow it to be proper,' he asked, 'that a rich man may only mind they things that 'e 'ave tried to do, wi'out asking no more of they soft maidens?'

'What 'ave 'ee tried to do?' Betty do ask, said the farmer.

'Though I be rich, I were poor an' lowly wi' Annie,' replied Pim modestly; 'an' rich or poor, a wedded man bain't always a knowing one.'

The farmer lifted Betty from the table.

'Tis time for Pim's song,' he said.

Mr. Pim raised his mug to his lips and drank. He felt the glory of his position with intense serenity. He was Pim, about whom all people talked and all honour was given, and to whom maidens would be driven in flocks if he but lifted his little finger.

But no, even though he might have them all, he refused. He still saw Annie's heaven as real and near, with that fine driver and all the

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heavenly shining of the carriage as wonderful and everlasting.

Mr. Pim waved his hand, breaking a little the curling halo of smoke above his head.

‘Annie!’ he called, ‘Annie! I be singing, Annie. I be singing to thee, Annie.’

Mr. Pim sang :

‘Oh, you shall drink wine

So sweetly in the season, then you shall be  
mine.

You shall have no pain ; I will you main-  
tain.

My ship she ’s a-loaded, just come in from  
Spain.’

Some while before Pim sang his song a stranger had softly entered the inn door, and sat upon a lonely bench beside it, not apparently being one of those who like to intrude too near upon the happiness of others.

This stranger was Fred Pim.

Fred had not sat long listening to what was being said before he easily understood that it was he, and not another, who was expected to come to Madder this second time, to enter the glory of his father, with a fine load of riches from Spain.

Fred watched his father lovingly ; he wanted to go near to him and tell him all about Derby.

No one knew him as Fred. It was not unusual

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for a tramp to creep into those doors to rest a little ; for Mr. Bugby with his bottle in the parlour hardly noticed his customers ; and this evening, for some reason, the landlord commanded his wife to draw the beer.

‘ An’ then go drown thee’s bloody self,’ he had said kindly, ‘ for Silent Woman’s sake.’

But only when Fred had first come in he had fancied for one moment that he might make himself known. Very soon he saw that this was impossible. He loved his father too much to wish to disturb all the happiness of his honoured calling as the father of a rich son.

After his father sang his song, Fred said to himself, ‘ ’Tis best for I to go right away to Spain.’ He saw himself going to Spain. He knew that it was possible to get to all kinds of strange places from the port of Weyminster. He supposed that he had only to go to Weyminster and then ship for Spain as a stoker.

All journeys now seemed possible to Fred. And then to come home really loaded and to marry Polly—how easy that seemed. And Fred saw himself return riding, too, upon a high-stepping white horse, as a nobleman had once ridden into Derby to unveil a memorial set up to certain other dead and gone and quite forgotten—except for the small pensions and the fine prances of that horse—eternally disposed-of Freds.

‘ But I would like to just touch my father.’

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Fred's heart spoke these words distinctly within him.

He now moved amongst the happy ones, with the seeming intention of warming his hands by the fire. As he went by Mr. Pim, Fred allowed his hand to rest for a moment upon that much-honoured gentleman's arm in an affectionate manner that no passing tramp should use towards the gentility of the land. Feeling the touch, Mr. Pim shook off his son's hand with an indignant gesture of disapproval ; and Farmer Barfoot rebuked the tramp for his familiar behaviour, informing him that Mr. Pim was the father of a very rich son who might that very evening be returning from Derby.

The stranger, thrust from the fire, returned to the door again, and remained standing, but with a view, no doubt, of shortly going out into the night.

Mr. Pim leant back in his chair, and spoke in the dreamy and contented manner of a rich and happy man.

'Tis a pleasant life that I do lead in Madder,' said Pim. 'A pleasant happy life in Madder thinking of me boy. An' as I were a-singing'—Pim's voice grew softer—'sooty ceiling did break out, an' Annie's face did peep in from heaven. 'Twas changed, thik heaven were ; 'twas gold-covered, and Annie did peep an' wink at I same as she would do when we met in lane.'

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' "There be room for you too here," Annie did say. And I nodded to she, an' I bain't no woon to doubt now, for now Fred be rich, 'e be mine.'

The stranger at this feast now opened the door and went out into the night.

*Chapter xxix*

THE FOOLISH GUILLEMOT

THE night was grown dull and misty again, but now and then a star would peep through the mist, as if to promise a clear sky later, when Fred Pim knocked at the back door of the Madder rectory.

After he knocked, Fred stepped back a little, so as not to give Polly the shock of seeing him so altered, before he could tell her how untidy he was with all his walking.

Fred waited for a moment or two, in joyful expectation watching the door. But as no one opened he went forward, again knocked, and again retreated into the shadow.

And then the door opened ; but it was not Polly who opened it, it was Miss Pettifer.

Miss Pettifer held a candle in her hand and peered out into the night. She had, by the look of her, been trying, in a lady-like way, to cook her own supper. But the butter, or at least some of it, that she had tried to get into the frying-pan to fry the sole with, had become attached to her hair, as Lily Parsons had once threatened.

Fred looked at Miss Pettifer and thought that Teddy the pedlar must be a bold man to say that she loved him. He remained hidden, and Miss



Pettifer, getting no answer to her angry question as to who was there, shut the door, bolted and locked it, and returned to her cooking.

‘But where was Polly?’ Fred wondered.

He opened and shut the heavy rectory gate as silently as he used to do when he visited Polly there, and stood in the lane under the great elm trees. He looked up at the servant’s window, but there was no light in it: and he now remembered Wimple had remarked at the inn ‘that Miss Pettifer had sent down to inquire whether Polly was there.’ But Fred hadn’t taken much notice of that, because he knew Miss Pettifer was always thinking that something else would happen after what had happened to Maud. Of course Polly would be at the rectory when he reached it.

But he was there now, and Miss Pettifer, with her front hair buttered, was a sure sign that Polly wasn’t in the kitchen, or indeed anywhere else in the house.

Fred Pim looked up at the bare elm boughs, as if to ask the trees where Polly was gone: but the great trees were hard of hearing, like old folks are who can only know of their own woes and only listen to their own moaning. Only a sad sound came from them, sad, like the weary moaning of a dying god.

Fred whistled softly. From where he was standing he could see the bright light of the inn lamp. The door was open now, for evidently

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the guests were leaving. But outside the inn, and shown clear in the stream of light that flowed from the door, there were the forms of men grouped close, as if they feared to separate and to enter the outer darkness. From this group there came the sound of a song—Mr. Pim's. And presently, when that was silent, Fred heard the sound of Farmer Barfoot's voice evidently trying to persuade Betty to start for home, and begging her in all kindness to him 'to mind they great stones.'

Fred whistled again.

There was a bark—a sharp, quick, happy bark—and Tim, the sheep-dog, bounded upon Fred, with the joy that only a dog can show to an old comrade who has returned home.

'Where be Polly?' asked Fred, who at last had found a living thing to answer his question. 'Where be me maiden that I do love?'

Fred walked to the rectory gate. But Tim didn't follow. Fred began to go a little way down the lane to where the Wimples lived. Tim whined, but wouldn't stir.

Fred came back and patted him, fondling his shaggy head.

'Won't 'ee tell poor Fred that 's been to Derby where Polly do bide?'

Tim crouched down and howled dismally.

'Where be she?' asked Fred again, who knew that Tim never howled for nothing.

Tim started down the lane that led to the

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downs. Fred followed. Now and again the dog would turn to see if Fred was coming too ; seeing him following, he went on again.

Upon the downs, at the place where Polly had sent the dog home, Tim howled again. But encouraged by Fred, he continued along the sheep-track, though more slowly now, that led, passing above Dodderdown, to the sea. Once Tim stopped. He stopped by the dead body of a sheep, that had evidently been caught in a gorse bush, and, unable to free itself, had died there.

The star that had promised a clearer night had spoken truthfully. And as it sometimes happens in dull or rainy weather, when the mist clears the stars shine with unusual brightness, so that the light they give is nearly as bright as moonshine.

The sheep lay dead in a little hollow through which the path went, and Fred, feeling himself a shepherd again, pulled the body out from the bush and examined it. Fred knew the sheep ; it was the same sheep that had so often led the others to escape from the Madder fold. But this time it had strayed too far, and the bush had caught it.

Fred resolved to bury the sheep when he returned from Spain, but that wouldn't be for some while, he feared.

He followed Tim sadly, thinking of the sheep. ' Why had it come to die there ? '

Fred knew the hollow well enough ; he had

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walked to it with Polly one Sunday before he left Madder.

‘Now, don’t ’ee be naughty, Fred,’ Polly had said upon that occasion, ‘for there bain’t no wedding-ring on me finger; and if pin ’ave a-pricked ’ee, ’tis no more than ’ee deserve. But kiss I, Fred, woon more little one.’

Polly had shaken herself free of him and was tidying her hair.

‘They small birds do sing pretty,’ she had said then, trying to draw Fred’s attention away from herself and towards the happy singing of the little birds. . . .

‘Yes, that be death,’ said Fred, as Tim howled dolefully beside the dead sheep.

The dog led him on. Dodderdown lay in a little cup in the downs, the church and even a white tombstone was visible. It was down there, so snugly laid, that Mark Only was buried. Fred remembered how Wimple used to tell in his usual merry manner, and he always liked a burial at the end of a tale, the story of Mark Only, telling how afraid Mark used to be of Death’s dogs, but later how he had fancied them as his friends and even looked for them.

‘Was he really going to Spain,’ Fred wondered, ‘or was Spain only the first word of a long sentence that led on and on until all words became one?’ For even meek Madder folk can sometimes see to the great end. His Spain was there, perhaps.

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Upon the high uplands, and near to a part of the cliff from whence the beach could be climbed down to, Fred stopped and called to Tim, who came back whining to him.

Fred trembled ; he was but, he knew, a mere Madder boy ; and a strange force was drawing him, and the dog too—for he had never known Tim act in this manner—on and on to where those waves were breaking.

Fred was still walking—he hadn't finished his long walk yet—and he had passed through Madder. He had passed Madder, as he had passed all those other little villages, those other towns, those bare, blank, withered spaces, for ever moving upon endless tarred roads. Endless, too, was the whirl of the motors upon those roads ; endless the human beings, all moving somewhere, all moving ; but all, perhaps, as he had come to do, passing by their homes.

Couldn't he have stayed in Madder ? Why had that lady wanted so much to send him off to where riches are, though as far in Derby from his possessing them as in any other wealth-ridden city in the world ? Why couldn't he have always lived in Madder, and Derby have remained safe in Spain, and nestled down into the Madder life that he knew and loved with Polly near to him ?

Spain ! Why had he thought of going there ? It was when he knew that his father had set so much store upon his returning rich that

## THE FOOLISH GUILLEMOT

the thought of the real Spain had come. But why should he go on to count those Spanish windows? Tim would never have howled like that had not something terrible happened, or was going to happen. And where was Polly? Perhaps Tim had only led him to find the dead sheep, and then had gone on to the cliff edge after the rabbits. But Tim never howled for nothing. Fred knew that.

He now tried to drive the dog away; he had no wish for Tim to follow him down there where the waves were breaking. If Tim went there he would follow him into the sea too, if that happened to be, as Fred knew it was now, the right road to Spain.

He succeeded at last in driving Tim away by throwing stones at him and shouting him off with angry gestures, so that the dog moved sullenly upon the homeward path, and disappeared like a forlorn shadow upon the downs.

When he was half-way down the cliff Fred heard the dog howl again.

'Tim do bide by dead sheep,' Fred said aloud, and waited for a moment, almost hoping that the dog might come back to him again. But no dog came.

Fred found Polly down on the beach, down by those waves, for she had been taken there by their guiding sound. She crouched upon the sands, trembling in her last fear.

Fred saw her and went near to her, but Polly



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stepped back nearer to the sea, and the white foam of a wave, cruel by the eternal habit of a vast unconsciousness, crept around her. . . .

Near to Polly, upon the wet sands, a foolish guillemot was resting. During the stormy weather the bird had decided that it had a careless mother who made the children's bed badly, so that there had been nothing to rest upon of late but nasty hills and valleys that jolted a simple bird most unpleasantly. The guillemot—who should be called wise and not foolish—thought that if it left the bed for a little while the mother of the home would make it better and pat down the feathers.

Polly Wimple had nearly trodden upon the guillemot, who had looked up at her with mild surprise.

When Fred found Polly, the bird flapped its wings, stood upon its feet, fell sideways with surprise, and then stood up again to watch what would happen next.

Fred held Polly, who told him what had happened. He released her, and walked with her into the sea.

The first wave they met drove them to shore again, but the return of it carried them out to meet another.

This other wave was raised up above its fellows a great distance from the land. It was a proud wave, mountainous and black. It wasn't the kind of wave to run on in mere foam ; it rolled



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heavy, it moved, a wall of dark waters. It was one of those huge waves that are only met with at night time on the high seas. It came out of the night and gathered the two drowning ones into its black womb. It broke upon them, and drew them by its undercurrent farther out to sea. . . .

The sea grew calmer, the guillemot fluttered and struggled and drew nearer to the waves. It dived, rose again, and floated ; the bed was now more comfortable.

From the land a dog, who waited beside a dead sheep, howled.

*Chapter xxx*

MR. MOODY FINDS  
SALVATION

THE morning after Fred's return to Madder Mr. Moody arrived upon his bicycle, to deliver his letters and parcels, in a good humour. The day before he had gone, by special invitation, with Mrs. Moody to the wedding of Mr. Hall, the lay chapel preacher.

Although Mr. Hall had spent some little time of late in a place very well suited to gruesome conjecture, the county gaol, yet no sooner was he out again than he went at once to Mrs. Parsons and invited Lily, who had indeed always blamed herself as much as the preacher for what had happened, to marry him.

'I never meant no harm to you, Lily,' Mr. Hall kindly explained; 'but I thought you felt so cold.'

'It's certainly time now,' said Lily, who had learned a little about the world from old gentlemen, 'for I to be saved from hell fire.'

After the wedding Mr. Moody shook Mr. Hall's hand earnestly, and as earnestly kissed Mrs. Hall.

'And I want to be saved too,' said Mr. Moody, 'from my wickedness.'

## MR. MOODY FINDS SALVATION

‘ You shall,’ replied Mr. Hall, in a low and sombre tone, as if he were addressing a corpse. ‘ For God is merciful to we poor sinners.’

As luck would have it, Mr. Moody met May Billy upon the Madder green, and May smiled. But Mr. Moody hurried on with his duties and prayed—for Mr. Hall always recommended prayer at any time of the day—to see something ugly so that he might get salvation.

With this praiseworthy desire in his mind, though with May’s skirt and pretty shape in his eye, Mr. Moody now knocked at the rectory door to deliver a parcel.

No one answered his knock.

Mr. Moody was by nature inquisitive, and now he peeped into Miss Pettifer’s dining-room window.

Miss Pettifer wore a faded dressing-gown of a faded grey colour, and her hair—at least all that was hers—looked sticky. Miss Pettifer was kneeling before the fire and blowing into it, evidently hoping that the damp paper and the damper sticks would catch alight. Miss Pettifer’s feet, clad in slippers of the same colour as her dressing-gown, strayed out behind her most despairingly.

Mr. Moody took a long breath and a longer look ; he was getting Miss Pettifer into him. May Billy fled from his mind’s eye, flying to that place where all wise men drive the pretty girls out to ; and Miss Pettifer came in to rule for

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ever as a deterrent to Mr. Moody's wanton pleasures. Mr. Moody found salvation. . . .

' 'Tis well,' said Mr. Moody, as he softly placed the parcel upon the upper step of Miss Pettifer's door, ' 'tis well that I be here, for now that all maids be same as she, 'twill be heaven for Moody.'

Although Mr. Moody found salvation that morning, Solly awoke sad. He had buried the *History of America* in the barren corner of his garden, and he missed it very much. He also fancied that Mrs. Crocker had told him in a dream that he must give Maud Chick what she asked of all the men—a baby. Mr. Solly was a little surprised that Aunt Crocker should have said that. He felt very sorry for Maud, but at the same time utterly unable to meet his aunt's wishes in the matter.

This morning Mr. Solly ate his bread and milk in a doleful manner, and he was thinking so much about Maud that he put into the basin a spoonful of salt instead of sugar. But he didn't think of what he ate, because he was praying to God to show him by a sign what Mrs. Crocker really intended him to do.

A good man's prayer is often answered at the very moment that his lips breathe the words. God's silent presence led Solly, who was ready enough to leave the bread and milk, out to the white gate of Gift Cottage. Solly leant over the gate and waited. Nancy Billy came proudly by.

## MR. MOODY FINDS SALVATION

Nancy was three years old, and really shouldn't have come by at all. She would never have been there, in the Madder world, if the church pews had been cleaner, so that May Billy could have knelt safely there instead of lying out under the green bushes with young Tom Tolly.

But now Nancy, born because the church wasn't swept—for though Mr. Tucker tried his best, he would so often fall to reading his naughty stories instead of sweeping—came by Gift Cottage nursing a doll.

'Me pretty baby,' exclaimed Nancy, swaying her own pretty body as she went by. 'Me pretty baby, that don't never cry.' . . .

Mr. Balliboy, the Norbury carrier, liked as he drove his car to have a suitable companion to sit beside him, to whom he could call attention to the curious fact that if you placed a foot firmly upon a piece of iron that projected from the floor the car would sometimes stop. When Mr. Balliboy would leave the car to itself half-way down a hill, in order perhaps to carry a packet of bull's-eyes to a child who had cried for them all one Sunday, he would usually turn to the passenger who sat with him and say, 'If car do start running back, jam down 'ee's foot on brake.'

Sometimes upon a market day Farmer Barfoot would visit Weyminster, riding beside Mr. Balliboy in the carrier's van. Upon these occasions, Mr. Balliboy would always look suspiciously at Betty, and pass more than one remark concerning

her, that would be very naturally resented by the farmer.

‘Were thee’s mother like she, farmer?’ Mr. Balliboy would inquire. And then he would shake his head slowly and say, ‘’Tis a mortal pity poor Betty were born so plain-looking.’

Whenever Mr. Balliboy saw some one coming down the lane that joined the main road, he always used to hope that it wasn’t Farmer Barfoot, because he would never trust that deformed foot with the brake. He now saw some one coming that proved, to the carrier’s great contentment, to be Mr. Solly, who mounted in a friendly manner beside Mr. Balliboy.

Solly had a proper reverence for Mr. Balliboy’s car, and was the sort of companion that Mr. Balliboy liked, because he could always be depended upon to foot the brake without upsetting the basket of eggs that was often near by. Solly would set his foot firmly down with a serious and attentive look, as if he knew well enough that all the lives of the travellers depended upon him.

‘She be good-tempered to-day,’ said Mr. Balliboy, as soon as Mr. Solly had settled in his seat and the car was started. ‘An’ I don’t mind telling you, Mr. Solly, that she do run best when there bain’t none of they wild winds blowing.’

Mr. Balliboy made this remark in a whisper, being secretly afraid that if ‘they wild winds’ heard what he said about them, they might rush

## MR. MOODY FINDS SALVATION

out suddenly from behind a lonely tree and stop the car.

' 'Tis best,' said the carrier, with the air of one who has made an important discovery, 'to let this young thing of a car 'ave she's own way ; for though I did buy she second-hand when t' other were stole and broke up, she bain't so very wold.'

' 'Tis best,' said Mr. Balliboy a little louder, so that the car could hear him, 'to let she go when she be minded, and stop when she be minded ; but,' Mr. Balliboy whispered, 'sometimes she be minded to go backwards.'

' I hope,' said Solly, putting his foot upon the brake, 'that she won't wish to do that to-day.'

' She may or she mightn't,' replied the carrier. ' But once I did know she take fright at one of they blue beauties, and run backwards up hill faster than ever she came down en.'

Half-way up a long hill Mr. Balliboy stopped the car, dismounted, and ran across a field, waving his hat in order to call the attention of a gentleman—Mr. Matterface—to the fact that he was waiting for him.

As soon as Mr. Balliboy left the car it began to run backwards. Solly pressed his foot upon the brake. The car stopped.

Starting again, with Mr. Matterface in a corner seat looking up at the sky as if he watched the playful angels dancing, Mr. Balliboy noticed that Solly didn't speak one word between two milestones.



## INNOCENT BIRDS

‘ You bain’t talking,’ said the carrier.

‘ No,’ said Solly, with a deep sigh ; ‘ I ’m thinking about poor Maud.’

‘ You do mean Maud Chick who be foolish ? ’

‘ I want,’ said Mr. Solly, ‘ to buy her a gift, and perhaps you can tell me how much a baby costs ? ’

‘ Nothing,’ answered Mr. Balliboy, ‘ unless you be one of they doubters same as rich Pim of Madder.’ . . .

At Weyminster, Mr. Solly walked up the street in a thoughtful manner. He prayed that the spirit of Deborah Crocker might tell him what to do.

About half-way up one of the two streets of the town, Mr. Solly stopped and looked into the window of a large toy-shop. A large doll lay in a cradle in the window, looking exactly like a sleeping babe with its eyes closed and a smile upon its lips.

‘ If poor Maud had that baby,’ said Solly, ‘ she would be happy.’

Inside the shop the doll appeared to be more wonderful than ever. Mr. Solly and the young lady who served—Miss Pity—stood near together and looked at it with admiration. Miss Pity, who never grew tired of looking at this fine doll, explained its wonders to Solly.

‘ It can do everything except cry,’ she said.

Mr. Solly, who had never known of a baby who did anything but cry, looked from the doll to Miss

## MR. MOODY FINDS SALVATION

Pity. He looked at Miss Pity as though he more than half believed that she was its mother.

Miss Pity, who had always wanted to own a baby herself, blushed.

‘Is it a little girl?’ asked Solly simply.

‘It’s got all the clothes that a little girl should have when she’s dressed nice,’ answered Miss Pity.

Solly, whose name, had he appeared in the *Pilgrim’s Progress*, would have been Mr. Modesty, changed the subject.

‘Do you suppose,’ he inquired, ‘that a young lady who isn’t quite what she should be in her mind, would think of her as a real baby?’

‘Even I find it a little hard sometimes not to think so,’ replied Miss Pity, looking out of the window.

‘Has she a name?’ asked Solly softly.

‘I call her Mary,’ said Miss Pity, still looking into the street.

‘Mary is a pretty name for a baby that never cries,’ Solly murmured.

Upon the return journey Mr. Solly sat with his foot near to the brake and nursed Maud’s baby. Instead of watching the happy angels, Mr. Matterface now watched the doll.

‘I bain’t woon to find fault wi’ nature,’ remarked Mr. Matterface, ‘but ’tis a pity they bain’t all same as thik.’

Mr. Balliboy nodded sadly.

*Chapter xxxi*

SOMEBODY FRIGHTENS  
MR. BUGBY

A MONTH after Mr. Solly's journey to Weyminster the wild winds awakened in real earnest, and came upon Madder with the suddenness that the Norbury carrier was wont to expect of them. The gusts drove and shouted about Madder, they ran along the hills like eager wolves, they bent the tall elms and shook the boughs in their anger.

One small twig fell upon Mr. Chick as he walked under the elm trees, returning home from Mr. Barfoot's stable. When he arrived at his cottage, he reported that the church tower was blown down, and that the flagstaff had struck him 'near dead.'

'Be thik all that 'ave fallen?' inquired Pim, who evidently expected more wonderful happenings. 'Be Polly Wimple real gone to Derby to find rich Fred, as folk say she be?'

'Polly be gone, sure,' said Mrs. Chick, replying for her husband, 'and no doubt 'tis Derby she be gone to.'

'Or else Spain,' said Mr. Pim.

'I did look into window of "Silent Woman,"' observed Mr. Chick, 'an' thik black glove be

## SOMEBODY FRIGHTENS MR. BUGBY

gone ; some one 'ave taken glove off picture and put en on table.'

'Were landlord in room wi' thik glove? for maybe Mrs. Bugby be drowned,' asked Pim.

'No,' said Chick, 'landlord weren't there, nor she neither, but Farmer Barfoot were holding up thik glove and looking at en.'

The wind howled round the cottage, and Chick looked sadly at the sacking bound round his legs.

'They snowstorms be coming before strap leggings,' he said ruefully.

'No one weren't serving farmer?' inquired Mrs. Chick.

'No,' replied Chick, 'there weren't nor mug on table, and farmer did only rest Betty and look at thik black glove. But that weren't all I did see.'

'Don't 'ee wait till Christmas to tell we, then,' said Mrs. Chick.

'When I were beside stile, setting woon leg over while t' other still bided, I did hear a bird come by.'

'Well, birds be birds,' said Mrs. Chick.

'Thik woon did pitch on inn thatch and spread out 's wings, and 'twere a large black bird.'

'Did 'ee look again to see if farmer were drinking?'

'Yes, t' other leg that bided did draw I back to window, and I did peep in again, but no one weren't serving farmer.'

Mrs. Chick opened the cottage door. She

## INNOCENT BIRDS

looked at the upper windows of 'The Silent Woman.' The windows, for the evening was now darkened, had lights burning in them.

'No one weren't serving farmer,' she said once again when she returned.

'No,' replied Chick.

'Then Mrs. Bugby be a-dying.'

After taking their tea, which they ate silently, the family under the Chick thatch, with the exception of Maud, looked at one another.

'Mrs. Bugby 'aven't been looking well lately,' remarked Pim.

'What be it you do do when you do lay out a party?' inquired Chick of his wife.

'I do first look to see what furniture there be in room,' replied the lady, 'an' then I do start to wash they dead bones.'

'Tis a mournful work,' said Chick, moving a little farther from his wife.

The flames from the log fire leaped and hissed and the storm grew louder without. But even with the noise of the wind, Mrs. Chick had been able to hear a motor car drive up to the door of 'The Silent Woman.'

'Tis the doctor,' she exclaimed excitedly.

A knock came at the cottage door. The knocker was Farmer Barfoot.

'You be wanted,' he said to Mrs. Chick, and at once began the difficult task of guiding Betty down the path again. Mrs. Chick rose, smoothed down her apron, and followed.

## SOMEBODY FRIGHTENS MR. BUGBY

Pim and Chick drew near to one another and looked at Maud. Maud was nursing the doll that Solly had given her. She pressed the doll against her. She leant over it, believing that she fed it with her milk. She rocked the doll. Maud smiled. She was happy. She began to sing softly 'There's a home for little children,' as if she were getting the child to sleep.

'I did use to wonder,' said Mr. Pim, 'how they children did come, and now I be wondering what use riches be?'

Chick looked from Maud to his legs.

'We don't pay nothing,' pursued Mr. Pim, 'when we do listen to farmer talking to 'is Betty; and poor Maud, that be happy now, don't pay nothing to love 'er dolly.'

'But me leggings,' murmured Chick.

'It don't cost I nothing to mind Annie,' said Pim.

'But rich Fred be coming, bain't 'e?'

Chick's tone was sorrowful.

'Polly Wimple be gone for 'im,' replied Pim. 'An' so long as she do bring Fred back to Madder, I don't trouble if 'e be as poor as thik tramp that did come to inn to warm 'isself.'

Mr. Pim looked at Maud.

''Tis a mother she be,' he said. 'An' bain't I a father too? But where be me boy Fred?'

Chick looked more and more despairingly at his own legs.

'A father that 'ave a son who may come 'ome

## INNOCENT BIRDS

to 'im poor, and whose mother be wi' God in heaven, shouldn't bide idle all these days.'

'No,' said Chick, a little more cheerfully. 'There be food and lodging 'ee do owe for that mid buy they leggings.'

'An' 'tis best I go work for farmer to-morrow,' said Mr. Pim.

Mrs. Chick had followed Farmer Barfoot to the garden stile. But there the good farmer paused, because Betty showed a distinct unwillingness to follow the other foot that had already climbed over.

'Now, Betty,' said the farmer, in the same cheerful tone he used to his brown pigs, 'don't 'ee bide there to be dog-bitten.'

Mr. Barfoot raised Betty carefully in the air and got her over. All safely over, the farmer remarked, 'Thee best go home, Betty, long wi' I, for though thee be so wise and knowing, 'ee don't want to bide wi' death at "Silent Woman."'

The farmer moved slowly off, guiding Betty around the large stones in the road, and cursing the darkness.

Mrs. Chick remained by the stile for a moment and looked in an interested manner at the lights in the upper windows at the inn. One of these windows suddenly became darkened. The large bird that Mr. Chick had noticed upon the thatch perched upon the window-sill, and there it stretched out its great black wings ready for flight.



## SOMEBODY FRIGHTENS MR. BUGBY

‘What be thik?’ said Mrs. Chick fearfully to the departing figure of the farmer; ‘’tain’t a cuckoo, be en?’

The farmer was gone too far off to hear her.

The bird stretched its neck as if it swallowed a little fish, left the window, flew low into the darkness and towards Maddar hill.

‘I be glad thik nasty thing be gone,’ said Mrs. Chick.

The doctor met her at the inn doorway and nodded in his usual friendly way.

‘’Tweren’t from drowning, I do hope?’ Mrs. Chick inquired.

‘No, no,’ said the doctor, stepping into the car; ‘only a seizure, Mrs. Chick.’

‘From pulling up thik water from well?’

‘That’s very likely the reason,’ said the doctor complacently, and started the car.

Mrs. Chick entered the inn and began to climb the creaking stairs. Passing by the bar door, she looked in and saw the black glove upon the table.

Mrs. Chick began to talk to herself to ease her journey up those seven steps.

‘’Tis the fourth,’ she muttered, ‘that “Silent Woman” ’ave killed; but I be glad she didn’t go an’ spoil thik well water for we tothers.’

At the top of the stairs Mrs. Chick met Mrs. Bugby. Seeing this apparition, as she fancied, Mrs. Chick nearly descended the stairs again faster than she had climbed them.

## INNOCENT BIRDS

‘What be doing dressed up?’ she asked, when she had got the better of her fear; ‘an’ who be gone an’ died if ’ee bain’t a-done en?’

Mrs. Bugby, without speaking, pointed to the bedroom door. Mrs. Chick went in.

After taking an inquisitive look round at the furniture, Mrs. Chick cautiously approached the bed.

Upon the bed lay Mr. Bugby. His mouth was twisted into an odd and awful grin, and his dead eyes stared in a horrible manner at the window. For a few moments Mrs. Chick gazed at him in astonishment and horror, then she said in a surprised whisper, ‘Somebody ’ave frightened Mr. Bugby,’ and then added in an easier tone, though a little contemptuously, ‘Chest of drawers she made so much of be only plain wood.’

*Chapter xxxii*

THE PERFECT GIFT

OFTEN the sea waves, although they christen them in the certainty of an everlasting reformation from all the old Adam, forget to name the dead that they give up.

And so when two unknown bodies too far gone in corruption to be recognised, male and female, as created and destroyed by a dread omnipotence, were washed up by the great storm upon the nearest beach to Maddar, no more than a little local notice was taken of the event.

Miss Pettifer had been informed by the police—to whom she had applied for help because she missed a crested spoon; ‘our crest is a chair,’ Miss Pettifer had said—that a young person answering to the description she gave of Polly had been found playing—so Mr. Tucker would have said—in one of the Derby open spaces, and was now safe lodged in prison, and was to be charged with corrupting the gentility of the third son of the virtuous nobleman who had ridden, when Fred Pim was there, so nicely upon a white horse into the town.

One of the largest Maddar trees lay blown down beside the road, and looked, thought

## INNOCENT BIRDS

Solly, who stood by the white gate of Gift Cottage, 'like a great whale brought ashore.'

Solly was sad. He had opened his book of the *History of America* in real earnest when Annie Pim was brought so grandly home to be buried ; and now he missed it more than ever upon this day of another funeral.

Hearing that Polly had followed Fred to Derby, Solly, though he couldn't doubt Aunt Crocker's vision, nor yet the promise of the dread being who had vouchsafed it, felt despairingly that he might die before the gift was given.

When one day the winds of heaven have done a mischief and uprooted a fine tree or two, they usually settle down the next day in order to see what has happened.

The day after the storm was very still, so that even Wimple's spade could be heard trimming the sides of the grave that he had dug to contain—for they were to be buried in one grave—the drowned bodies.

On his way to the churchyard to complete his task, Wimple had encountered Mr. Chick. Chick was full of the exciting news that Mr. Pim had begun that morning to work for Farmer Barfoot, and had been overheard to say that Fred was his son, and that all he wished for in the world now was to see him 'counting of farmer's sheep.'

Chick hadn't said two words before Wimple took him firmly by the arm.

## THE PERFECT GIFT

'Do 'ee come now,' said Wimple, 'and take a peep into grave ; 'tis a deep woon.'

Chick turned pale, and, freeing his arm, burst through the hedge and ran across the meadow towards the safety of his cottage.

Although the day was so quiet it was dark and gloomy, for the sun could not but remember how he had once kissed, in a wanton and naughty manner, the nakedness of little Polly.

According to his habitual custom, though he certainly never expected anything to come there that day, Mr. Solly watched Madder hill.

As he watched, a cormorant flew out of the bush upon the summit, and went westwards in a direct line.

'I hope that bird isn't going to America,' Solly said ; 'for the Americans have no history to save them now.'

'I wonder who the two drowned ones are?' Mr. Tucker asked Solly, who attended the funeral.

'We 'll watch,' said Solly.

'And pray,' said Mr. Tucker. . . .

'Where be Chick ?' asked Wimple when he had finished filling in the graves ; 'for I do want thik poor man to see they few bones I 've a-turned out on grass.'

'Mrs. Chick did tell I,' said Mr. Pim, who was watching the sexton, 'that she's husband were so turned by what 'ee did say to 'im in lane that 'e be gone to bed wi' 'is leggings on, and don't talk of nothing but only worms.'

## INNOCENT BIRDS

‘Chick bain’t no man, same as I be a man,’ remarked the sexton proudly, ‘that do fancy a good dug grave better than ’s bed.’

Although the burying of them was so little noticed in Madder, Mr. Solly couldn’t help thinking a great deal of the two drowned ones who lay in the Madder churchyard.

He had buried his Americans, but though buried they still spoke to Solly, which is easy to believe when we consider that Captain John Brown was buried too.

But what they told Solly from the corner of the garden he wasn’t sure of. Though one thing he knew beyond a doubt, and that was that Madder didn’t seem to be the same place to him now.

Time went on, of course, and the usual events that time is delivered of. Chick and Pim worked in the fields, and Wimple always kept his pick-axe clean and his spade ready. Farmer Barfoot’s waggons rumbled down the Madder lanes, going to Stonebridge for cake or coal, as Betty advised.

But even though Miss Pettifer now bought bacon at the Billys’ shop, which went a long way to show that all was like it used to be, yet Mr. Solly couldn’t help being sure that all was different.

He couldn’t avoid noticing—perhaps with the help of a buried American—that something had happened. It might have been all his fancy, or had something wonderful really happened?

Time went on, but with a difference—with a wonder in its heart.

## THE PERFECT GIFT

Time went on, a-growing and falling, a-sowing and harvesting ; the breath of life given, and the breath of life taken away.

All went on 'as one views a picture,' thought Solly, 'a picture that can show a vaster and a grander one behind it.'

Not that Solly's interest or happiness in Madder life was in the least exhausted, for he felt now, as he always used to, the sorrow and the joy, the chirping in summer, and the shivering in winter, of the tom-tits and the sparrows.

But now Pim was but Pim, and Solly couldn't help noticing that though Mr. Pim never sang his song now, he often looked in a mild and loving manner at the skies, and would tell Mrs. Bugby, who sold bottled beer and gave away money to strange girls, about Annie's heaven.

That something had happened to Madder Solly was sure, because he never wished now to pray looking up at Madder hill.

'But though I don't wish to look up,' thought Solly, 'there is no reason why I shouldn't look down to pray.' And as if they were come on purpose to help him, he remembered just then certain quaint lines of poetry that his aunt had taught him when he was a child :

'While Jesus on the lap of Mary lies,  
She can see Heav'n, and ne'er lift up her eyes.  
This new Guest to her eyes new laws hath giv'n,  
'Twas once, Look up, now 'tis, Look down to  
Heav'n.'



## INNOCENT BIRDS

'You look a pretty one,' said Solly one winter's night, and took an oak log from the basket where he kept them ready for use. Mr. Solly laid the log upon the fire, and watched the flames curl up around it.

The log burnt itself out.

'I may have been dozing,' thought Solly. 'I had better go to bed.'

Mr. Solly blew out one of the candles that were burning upon the table, and taking the other one in his hand he went up the first two steps on his way to bed. He had grown so accustomed to seeing a day or a time that he had spent with his aunt, near and very real, that he wasn't in the least surprised when the stair carpet transformed itself into a little wood of beech trees, with beech nuts lying about under them that he and his aunt were picking up and eating, and a little brook that in that place was rather shallow and weedy, with forget-me-nots that had lingered into October growing beside it.

'Yes, Aunt, I am pleased we came,' Solly had said then.

'I came here when I was a child,' Aunt Crocker replied, 'and I like beech nuts.' . . .

Solly awoke at midnight. He awoke out of a dream, and sat up in bed.

The night was very still, and the stars shone clear, as they sometimes do in the winter when the weather hesitates between frost and rain, and allows the frost to come because it's the nearest.

## THE PERFECT GIFT

Solly's dream had been a conversation, and he continued it while awake. He found himself saying, 'Yes, I do believe you, Aunt. I know it will be a gift worthy of the kingly giver.'

'Then go and see what the gift is, dear Solly.'

'I'm quite awake now,' said Solly, and the dream and the conversation vanished.

But Solly felt sure that the hour had come for him to see what the gift was.

He dressed himself, but without lighting a candle.

'I must not disturb the darkness,' he said, 'for it is the darkness that guides us to the light.'

Mr. Solly opened the window of Gift Cottage and looked out. The stars were pearl beads sewn in God's garment.

Solly looked towards the churchyard. Something shone there ; not a bright light by any means, but rather a dim one, a light that Solly thought could only be a simple lantern. While he watched the light Solly heard a sheep's-bell ring.

'That's Mr. Tucker,' said Solly.

Solly took his overcoat from its peg, and putting a shawl of Mrs. Crocker's round him, he buttoned the overcoat over that, and went out into his garden.

Softly closing the gate of Gift Cottage, he found himself in the lane that led to Madder church. The darkness pointed out to him where the light was. He stayed for a moment beside Mr. Soper's tombstone.

## INNOCENT BIRDS

Yes, there was Mr. Tucker kneeling beside the grave under which lay the two drowned ones who had been washed up by the waves of the sea.

Mr. Tucker was wrapped in a large rug ; he had placed his hat upon a flat tombstone near by ; his lantern was upon the grave. The candle in the lantern burnt clear because the night was still and friendly.

Mr. Tucker didn't seem in the least surprised to see Solly when he came near to him.

'I came out here for a little air,' he said. 'I have been sitting up with Susy to-night, but she's fallen asleep now.'

"I'll go and dust the church very soon, won't I, Mr. Tucker?" Susy said. I told her she would soon go there.

"Church bain't so very dirty, be en?" she said then. "'Tain't we praying folk that do mind they hopping fleas."

Mr. Tucker looked up at Solly ; he appeared to be holding something in his hand under his rug.

'You've been reading your book?' said Solly.

'I have been reading,' replied Mr. Tucker joyfully. 'I have been reading the last chapter in my book, in which a candle is mentioned.'

Solly looked at the lantern.

'I believe,' said Solly, 'that God's gift is given.'

Solly looked at the grave.

'Who are they?' asked Mr. Tucker,

## THE PERFECT GIFT

‘Polly Wimple and Fred Pim,’ said Solly.

There was a light burning in Susy’s cottage, and Mr. Tucker now watched it.

‘The Americans,’ said Solly, ‘told me before I buried them to whom the gift was to be given, and now I wonder whether the last chapter of your story-book happened to mention what the gift was.’

‘You have never read anywhere, have you,’ asked Mr. Tucker, who evidently wished to carry the conversation away from his book of stories, ‘that the grave is a gate?’

‘I believe some one has called it a golden one,’ replied Solly.

Mr. Tucker blushed, but only the stars noticed it.

‘But the gift,’ said Solly. ‘What is the gift?’

The light in Susy’s cottage went out.

But the light in the churchyard still shone.

Mr. Tucker now took up his lantern and moved about, looking an odd figure indeed amongst the tombstones, that Fred Pim, as a boy, counted so carefully. Mr. Solly watched, and wondered what stone it was Mr. Tucker wanted to find. The light from the lantern showed up each stone that Mr. Tucker went near and its shadow. The light moved like a large glow-worm.

Mr. Tucker stopped. He held the lantern close to a stone that was very old.

Solly went to him.

## INNOCENT BIRDS

‘Read,’ said Mr. Tucker. ‘The secret is out, the gift is given. Read.’

Mr. Solly read slowly :

‘How strangely fond of Life poor mortals be.  
How few ho see my bead would change with me.  
Then serious reader tell me which is best,  
The toilsome journey or the travelers rest.’

All was silent when Mr. Solly finished his reading. In the silence Time came by. The seasons came too : spring, with its chill snow-flakes, hail, and meek primroses ; summer, with its haymaking, and harvest, that follows so soon after the hay is gathered ; and then autumn, with Chick and Pim throwing muddy mangels into farm carts, when the Madder leaves are yellow and the rain drips ; and last of all, winter came. The four seasons passed, coloured by all human pains, human passions and desires, and by good and evil.

Sorrow and joy passed too ; while man born of a woman sat at the feast of life, each one waiting in his place until God’s gift be given to him. . . .

Whether or not it was Susy’s death that made Mr. Tucker a little more careless of his personal property than usual, we cannot say, but in leaving Susy’s cottage, after praying with Solly ‘that all men and women might find their end as happily as Susy had found hers,’ Mr. Tucker let fall his story-book in the road beside Miss Pettifer’s gate.

## THE PERFECT GIFT

In the morning, when Miss Pettifer went to see if Mr. Moody had dropped one of her letters as he opened the gate—a mischance that the lady always expected to happen—she saw Mr. Tucker's book.

Miss Pettifer pounced upon it like a cat, and hurriedly carried her prize into her dining-room, where a good fire was burning, owing to Mrs. Billy having advised paraffin as a help to a lonely lady, and placed the book upon the table, where she had so often bitten Mrs. Crocker and Mr. Tucker with her bacon.

Miss Pettifer opened the book eagerly, intending to enjoy herself at least for that morning, and then to forward the book to the bishop to show him what wicked stories his clergy read.

Miss Pettifer opened the book at the last page, and before she could stop herself doing so, she read these words :

‘ And there shall be no night there ; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun ; for the Lord God giveth them light : and they shall reign for ever and ever.’

Miss Pettifer rose hastily and threw Mr. Tucker's story-book into the fire.

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